Reading Pedagogy that Engages All Students -- Even the Boys!

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

By

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Abstract

Statistical analyses reveal that boys struggle with reading all over the world. As a result, educators have sought authentic ways to change the reading experiences of young, reluctant male readers. These educators are not privileging boys over girls; rather, they seek to create methodologies to empower all students to acquire basic literacy skills. This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study captured the insights of teachers working with young boys in an international school setting undergoing a purposeful shift in teaching pedagogy. The insights gleaned from this study-shed light on the boys’ experiences through the perspective of their teachers. The change in pedagogical practices that took place at this school aimed to establish a readers workshop approach to reading instruction with the goal of improving the literary lives of the students at the research site that had formerly used an unclear and unfocused philosophy on reading instruction. Self-determination theory provided the lens through which the researcher analyzed the data. Four themes emerged: (a) Effects of shifting pedagogy, (b) Constructing a learning community, (c) Comprehending the contribution of culture and gender on reading, and (d) Changing perspectives. Participants re-examined their educational approaches, benefiting students because the impact of students’ voices and choice and how gender and culture played into the learning environment were incorporated in the design of pedagogical practices. The educators changed their pedagogical perspectives at the end of the initiative. The data suggests further investigation is needed that focuses on student voices. Findings are relevant for educators and administrators who work with students beginning their literacy and reluctant middle year children who have not developed a passion for reading.

Keywords: reading, readers workshop, elementary school, boys & engagement, interpretative phenomenological analysis, self determination theory
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Chapter 1: Identification of the problem

Statement of the Problem

Literacy is a gateway skill for learning and functioning in our modern society. Regardless of how quickly new technologies evolve, we must be able to read with questioning minds and to write with confidence. However, despite the continuing need for literacy skills in our high tech world, an alarming number of young male students are turned off from the world of literariness. This occurrence is not limited to socio-economic status, geography, or ethnicity. Determining what is causing this phenomenon is essential, and the roots of it are multifaceted. Low achievement in literacy skills can and ultimately does result in young males disengaging from other aspects of school. Consequently, more boys are likely to be expelled, suspended, and, especially in the younger grades, held back (Matthews, Ponitz & Morrison, 2009).

Many would argue that male students have always held the upper hand in education. Therefore, to suggest boys face particular challenges or are marginalized in school might appear to be a ridiculous notion. Indeed, it is important to point out that, despite all the gains females have made in education, they still lag behind their male counterparts in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields. Furthermore, even though women now outnumber men in undergraduate colleges, males still dominate in the world of technology and engineering. However, increasingly, it has become apparent that through internalized everyday actions, males have increasingly become “influenced by particular attitudes and actions” (Scholes, 2010) that negatively impact their ability to engage with literacy; data reveals that girls living within the same cultures and socioeconomic status are not as adversely affected in this area (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2007). Watson and Kehler (2012) confirmed that, in 2009, girls outperformed boys in reading in all the countries participating in a study undertaken in 2010 by
the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Scholars have found that many boys do not commonly see the value of education, cannot buy into the need to read well, and often cannot read (Bausch, 2007; Farris, Werderich, Nelson, & Fuhler, 2009). This study has attempted to provide answers as to why this is the case, and it maps ways though which literacy instructors can engage all students, particularly boys, in reading and literacy.

The purpose of this study was to explore the understandings and beliefs of classroom teachers as they work with young male students to better understand what practices might motivate boys to engage better with reading.

Students enrolled in the American international school that is the focus of this study have experienced uncoordinated instructional methods in reading instruction since the school was created. This unclear vision on teaching reading changed when the school adopted a readers workshop model of instruction to guide its reading pedagogical practices. The readers workshop model is an approach to reading instruction based on the premise that students build their skills when they are given the opportunity to read every day for sustained periods with texts that have inherent interest to the individual and that that they can decode with an accuracy of 95% or above (Allington, McCuiston, & Billen, 2015; O’Connor, Bell, Harty, Larkin, Sackor, & Zigmond 2002). This alliance of text difficulty to student’s skills is aligned with explicit focused instruction in targeted mini lessons where skills are demonstrated and then independently used by students in multiple extended scenarios (Duke & Pearson, 2008; Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (2014).

This shift in practice was urgently needed at the school as some teachers were only just beginning, with hesitation, to do more than ask students to participate in sustained silent reading. Because it serves an expatriate community, the school has a transient school population and as
such an urgent need existed to find more impactful ways to engage young boys in reading. It was recognized that if these young male students were not brought into the world of literacy in a purposeful way during their tenure at the institution, they would potentially move onto their next school with limited literacy skills, in the best case scenario, and with utter disinterest in the world of reading in the worst.

Young males must recognize that they are not alone in falling behind in prescribed notions of literacy; however, without effective interventions, this cycle of literacy inadequacy intensifies: “Boys who do not experience competence with literacy tasks will avoid them and thus become less competent” (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004, p. 456). The problem of disjointed systems of instruction in literacy often becomes systemic in international schools or in other U.S.-based schools with transient student populations. As such, the goal of this research was to better understand what practices might motivate boys to engage with reading by documenting the perspectives of teachers in order to discover and alleviate reading engagement and achievement discrepancies between boys and girls; ultimately, the study aimed to assist in the development of pedagogies that support the learning of all students.

Studies have looked at reading material (Bausch, 2007; Brozo, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Young & Brozo, 2001; Zambo, 2007) or the gender of the teacher (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Sokal, Thiem, Crampton, & Katz, 2009) as defining factors; other researchers have examined the teaching strategies used to engage male readers (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Bausch, 2007; Bryan, 1999; Brozo & Flynt, 2007; Durik, Vida, Eccles, 2006; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Reutzel, Child, Jones, & Clark, 2014; Velluto & Barbousas, 2013). Lacking from the literature, however, were studies that applied a purposeful methodology to understand the experiences of teachers intimately engaged in the art of teaching reading and that sought to
examine first-hand the impact these strategies have on young male readers. Research in this area has largely focused on literacy instruction either through a statistical lens with large samples or through controlled interviews with students, which as Van Manen (1990) contended, “seems to be cutting us off from the ordinary relation adults have with children” (p. 139). By allowing teachers to reflect and give voice to their experiences, this study aimed to provide a more nuanced view of the learning trajectories of young male students as they experience reading pedagogy in school.

The intent of this study was to analyze the perceptions of teachers engaging in the daily practice of teaching reading to reluctant and enthusiastic readers with the goal of acquiring qualitative data to help guide pedagogy that would engage and connect all students with the reading process.

The audience for this study includes parents, teachers, and administrators of schools experiencing discrepancies in the achievement of male students in the area of literacy, compared to their female counterparts. Furthermore, the data generated by this research could have practical implications, guiding changes in instructional methods for independent international private schools, which are a large and growing phenomenon. The findings could also assist other types of school facing a similar problem, helping them to improve their literacy pedagogy (“UAE has the highest numbers,” 2015)) such as public schools where teaching methods are harnessed by the obligations of standardized testing and other externally imposed mandates.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Globally, the need to critically look at current reading instruction and who it serves has never been more pertinent. “According to the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO, 2008) in Canada and the National Assessment of Education Progress (2009) in the
USA, female students consistently score higher than boys on their perspective high-stakes literacy tests” (Watson, 2011, p. 780). This phenomenon is not restricted to North America, but is observed consistently across a diversity of cultural, language, and school system settings (Brozo, 2011). A steady flow of research highlights the discrepancy in outcomes between girls and boys in the area of literacy development. Headlines overstating the gains of feminism have captured attention worldwide, and reports have often disregarded research examining this phenomenon, referring to it as an attempt to justify the “reestablishment of boys as privileged subjects” (Watson, 2011, p. 780).

On the national level, the impact of standardized testing has forced teachers to employ draconian methods for teaching reading which allow them very little flexibility to adapt to the needs of diverse groups of children. The demand to have students score well on tests has created a nation of excellent test takers rather than students who have learned to read for pleasure or information (Ravitch, 2010). This test-driven style of pedagogy, as Applegate and Applegate (2010) observed, does not allow students opportunities to engage with a text in a purposeful way.

Ultimately, when teachers are forced to spend significant amounts of time preparing students to take standardized tests, the development of critical thinking skills is compromised. A crucial part of the development of critical thinking skills that is often overlooked involves the ability to reflect on learning and being. High-quality purposeful reading instruction in a reader’s workshop model that is inclusive of all students within a community of learners (Hudson & Williams, 2015) may mean the difference between success and failure for male students in the area of literacy. The approach does not involve the teacher-constructed relationship required in a literature circle format; instead, it incorporates genuine interest from the students that stems from them reading and analyzing books of common interest.
At the local level, at the international, private American school in the Middle East where this IPA took place, the need to look at reading pedagogy had never been more relevant. When this study was conducted, the school had been operating for only five years with several changes in the leadership structure and a massive growth of the student population that resulted in a significant influx of new teachers. All of these changes combined meant that the school was not clearly articulating its philosophy on reading; students and teachers alike experienced a disconnected approach to reading instruction. The situation was exacerbated because the school was incorporating a growing population of boys who had not been schooled in North America or Europe and who had far less exposure to reading and literacy instruction than both their other male and their female peers. Recognizing the intrinsic value of literacy was particularly challenging for this population of boys. This influx of students lacking literacy skills coincided with the United Arab Emirates declaration of 2016 as the “Year of Reading” (“UAE declares 2016,” 2015). This incentive focused on reading with two goals in mind. The first goal was acknowledging that literacy helps build a nation of thinkers and innovators who can understand global dynamics and can thus make informed decisions; the second factor, which potentially had significant repercussions for the region involved “the importance of reading in promoting tolerance, openness and intercultural communication” (“UAE declares 2016,” 2015). The guidelines also addressed the need to bring to the forefront gender-based discrepancies in achievement in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries where boys were outperformed by their female peers in all of the international assessments of reading, math, and science (Ridge, 2014). These initiatives did not seek to privilege a particular gender, but rather sought to close acknowledged achievement gaps.
The local communities are beginning to adopt the western model of reading to children. This difference in cultural norms creates an additional sub-group of male students who are performing at even lower levels. In the early 2016 assessment cycle for reading, 15 of the 21 first graders who were identified as reading over a year below expectations were boys. This pattern was continued into second grade where 16 of the 24 students performing over a year below expectations were boys.

Along with cultural differences, additional demands are placed on Arab nationals who must attend additional Arabic and Islamic classes. Some of the most vulnerable students therefore miss the enriched learning activities that are conducted for other students. This is particularly harmful to these students as they also often lack opportunities to work with the English language and thus English literacy skills after they leave school. This loss of learning opportunities means that these young students are not privy to learning interventions that research has shown helps to fill gaps in their learning. (Blachman et al., 2014; McCarthy, Whitebook, Ritchie, & Frede, 2010).

The results from this study may have helped influence school leaders to decide to use readers workshop models in their classrooms with a goal of assuring that pedagogical practices help all students rather than disbar one group. Reading instruction should not be a gender-bound activity. If, as educators, we do not make changes to engage males who are left standing at the threshold of learning, then we will have missed an opportunity to teach all our students. As Rokos and Neuman (2013) observed: “If we want students to read like detectives, then we need to create places where they can explore, read and interact like literate citizens” (p. 472).
Positionality Statement

As a scholar-practitioner who is embedded in the community in which this study took place, it is imperative that I present the lens through which I conducted my research. Additionally as a school leader, I must identify and share the frustrations and roadblocks that arose as I sought to overhaul the literacy landscape within the school that is the focus of this study.

Author’s Background

I am a White, British, highly educated married woman who has spent half of her life outside the country of my birth living and working in various international locations. During this international odyssey, I have raised two sons who approached the world of literacy differently. One went into kindergarten reading; the other was not enthralled with the process until the end of first grade. They were both blessed with exceptional teachers who allowed them to follow reading paths that included *Calvin & Hobbes* (1988) and the ever popular but controversial *Capt. Underpants* (1997). Thus, I know boys can be engaged in reading; it just takes finding methods, structures, and resources that draw them in. They may or may not read the same books as their female peers, which is okay. In spite of this, I realize that caution is needed as “getting boys to read is not simply a matter of locating texts with a male protagonist in an action-oriented setting or stocking libraries with graphic novels” (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 588).

As a product of the British education system who then sought higher education in the United States to escape the rigid confines of British academies, I can all too clearly empathize with students who dislike being forced to read texts to which they have no connection. I remember very well the extreme apathy I had as student for the micromanaged readings in the syllabus of my English literature class.
Ultimately, as a parent of two very active boys, I am aware that, during my years as a teacher, I have been drawn to that child who can barely sit in their chair during the day, the one who longs for the freedom of recess so that they can run, jump, and climb. I have understood that child who just cannot walk in a straight line down the hallways and who is constantly on the move. I empathize with the child for whom the whole process of sitting still and engaging with a book seems daunting. I have a particular compassion for the ones who can find nothing that entices them to sit still and focus on this skill called reading. I always hope to be the one who can turn that child around, just like somebody did for my son all those years ago. I acknowledge that I am bound by my experiences as a mother to two sons to turn the “other into a you” (Briscoe, 2005, p. 34) and to give a voice to the often not perceived underdog of a young male child in today’s education system. I hope to make a difference with children who are disinterested in literature. I want to compel them to read, no matter what their gender identity is.

**Author’s Current Situation**

I enjoy a certain level of privilege to enact change. I am a vice-principal within my organization, and, with that position, I have the power to influence to assist in creating a change in the reading pedagogical practices at our school. I work at a large, new American curriculum school located in the Middle East. We serve students both expatriate and local students. The parents of these students want their children to have an American education. The educational experience available at our international school is quite liberal, and it contrasts with the approach that students encounter at local public schools. The school attempts to embrace the best of the American education system, serving boys and girls together, which does not happen in a public school in this region of the world. The school serves students from more than 90 countries; they come to us with a wide variety of English communication skills. Socio-economically, all of the
families of these students live above the poverty line. I did not interview teachers working with students in more socioeconomically challenged situations; however, my research does bring important insights to pedagogies that address literacy with male youth in an international setting.

One of the issues that I addressed when being interviewed for my current position was the uncoordinated literacy program that was being employed at the elementary school. I envisaged a model of workshops, professional development, and support that could guide the elementary school to be teaching reading through a workshop model. Recognizing the substantial library resources that were purchased in 2014 and the large order of similar materials placed for the 2016 – 2017 school year, and tapping the existing technological assets, I felt that we had the potential to make a difference.

In addition, as an individual who had recently worked as a classroom teacher and who created a readers workshop model within that space, I have seen the benefits of the practice for my students. I have had the advantage of working previously in schools where such pedagogical practices were expected, but which did have a more homogenized student body when it came to English skills.

**Researcher Bias**

My views on reading practices have been impacted by the fact that I have lived and worked in countries other than the place of my birth. I fully comprehend that, as a researcher, “taking the perspectives of people who are rooted in backgrounds that contrast their own is required of individuals seeking to understand their own and others’ cultural heritages and communities” (Carlton Parsons, 2008). In addition, I have come to know during my years working in international schools that parental roles regarding reading and literacy are not automatically transferable across cultures. Where middle-class parents from my country
(England) and my adopted one (the United States) have been bombarded with information regarding the importance of reading to their children, that message is only just now being heard by many of the parents of the students I serve in the Middle East. I have perhaps become “fluent” (Fennel & Arnot, 2008) with the culture that I reside within, which has resulted in me prioritizing the values and traditions that impact my students. However, I am fully cognizant that evidence suggests that across multiple countries and backgrounds, “boys are struggling with literacy, especially when compared with girls at the same level” (Senn, 2012).

On a personal level, I find it frustrating that I encounter teachers who are still employing teaching strategies that allow for no independent work and who rely on pre-printed read and response-type of engagement pedagogies with no patience for male students who do not wish to read the canonized tests of the elementary years. These texts do not interest these students. I am exasperated with teachers who fail to comprehend the learning processes of male students. Male students may act differently than their female peers within the classroom, but this does not mean they are any less able to be engaged in the world of books. In addition, I am discouraged when I work with teachers who could engage in new pedagogies, but are limited in their ability to do so; their misunderstandings of concepts has a significant impact on their students. Ultimately, I acknowledge that I am aggravated with teachers who are resistant to new innovations in teaching literacy and who reminisce inside a world of how things used to be done.

As such I had to be cognizant of the fact that they the teachers may be resistant to my influence in their teaching practices. However, I have respected the level of independence my teachers have. Our school is large, and teachers are accorded a great deal of autonomy that I did not wish to reduce. This independence is one of our strengths because it encourages innovative thinking and creative praxis in teaching. I have been gracious in recognizing that there still may
be those teachers who will quietly close the door of their classroom and ignore any new change initiative; I have, however, attempted to not be brusque in my approach. Change creates tension; I have done my best to support them when they might have felt their professionalism was questioned. I attempted to establish a new approach to not only engaging male students, but to simultaneously capture the imagination of all our pupils in the world of reading. I readily recognized, however, that without teacher “buy in,” the shift in the pedagogical approach to reading would not significantly impact practice.

As I considered my position as an initiator of change, I was aware that the teachers with whom I work may have viewed me as an outsider. In my previous role as a classroom teacher, I was one of them -- an insider -- hoping to enable shifts in practice. However as my job shifted to that of vice-principal, my position and responsibilities within the school changed, so I had to be aware of not turning my colleagues into “others” (Briscoe, 2005). Ultimately, it was incumbent on me to not become the outsider looking in; I attempted to remain involved with the classroom teachers as an insider.

My journey as a mother and an educator means I am an individual who is an advocate for reading pedagogy that assists all students. This vantage point has allowed me to consider multiple perspectives through which to view the subject of low reading achievement, especially with male students. I believe that I have, as Machi and McEvoy (2012) suggested, reflected and found a window through which to view this issue and which is of great value to me as scholar-practitioner. Working in an institution that is new and that is consequently at times disorganized and chaotic has presented opportunities for risk taking. Being able to be involved in this school at a time when it was solidifying its identity and was attempting to find learning opportunities that would serve all students, I have had a unique opportunity to offer ideas on literacy
instruction to guide the school towards a learning style that would seek, as Franklin (2014) suggested, to be inclusive of all students.

Central Research Question and Sub-question

This study has explored teaching methods regarding student engagement and skills attainment in the area of reading literacy from the perspective of teachers in an international school. It found evidence to assert that gender, English language skills previously acquired, and pressures from standardized test preparations can impact the practice and learning opportunities of students in reading at school. It focused on the acquisition of literacy amongst boys in an international school in a country in the Mideast (Berliner, 2011, Catsambis, Mulkey, Buttaro, Steelman, & Koch, 2012, Long, 2004). The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how teachers in a school where a purposeful shift to a readers workshop model of instruction occurred understood and believed about this experience for young boys.

Central Question

How do teachers who are involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practices understand and believe about this experience for young male students?

Subquestion

• What are the experiences of teachers using a readers workshop method of instruction with male students?

Rationale for the Questions

Reading is an integral part of functioning in society. From the barrage of text messages, a person receives daily to the multiple sources of information that we are presented with as we go about our everyday affairs. If an individual cannot access that information, they are blocked from truly interacting with the knowledge that is available at their fingertips. As such the
importance of engaging all students in the literacy process cannot be understated. The gatekeepers for many students to this literary knowledge are their teachers. Thus the research topic; How to engage all the students no matter the gender is dependent on the teachers being willing to let go of practices and ways of being that they are comfortable with and being prepared to implement new practices to assist youth in learning how to read. This requires teachers to understand the mechanics of the new methods of instruction and to incorporate these into new learning strategies with youth. Also, it is important to know what areas of instruction teachers find challenging so that support and guidance can be given where needed. Research has indicated that students make cognitive connections when they relate to texts; when they are isolated from the text, they make little to no connection and do not transfer cognitive and analytical skills. Therefore observing how teachers describe how students respond to changes in reading instruction is valuable for understanding classroom pedagogy. This knowledge is vital, even though it may not immediately be apparent if pedagogical innovation leads directly to a change in student attainment. If there is a difference, however, in how students perceive their experiences with books, then perhaps it will be possible to generate ideas about the potential long-term gains of a shift in practice for these pupils.

Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory (SDT) suggests that when conditions are right, individuals are capable of establishing a desire to complete tasks and assignments. It is necessary to investigate methods of instruction that might engage young male students in the reading process. Thus, it makes sense to examine this issue through a lens that includes an innate sense of motivation. The issue is not to motivate individuals to read but to examine carefully the “quality of motivation” (Terry, 2013), built through the perceptions of the teachers who are actively
engaged with students in their classrooms. However, without understanding what creates the
desire to learn, which is the very bedrock for building knowledge, educators cannot address the
puzzle of how to facilitate an inner desire to learn. “Motivation is vital: if students do not want
to learn, little learning is likely to take place…because learning is an active process requiring
conscious and deliberate effort” (Stipek, 1988, p. ix, as cited in Beachboard, Beachboard, Li, &
Adkison, 2011). SDT provides a lens through which an investigation can examine the practices
of teaching and learning that is positively influenced by the facilitation of motivation within
students. This data then can provide evidence to support the implementation of a shift in reading
pedagogical practice in a readers workshop.

Self Determination Theory

Scholarship on SDT first emerged in the 1970’s. It was later expanded through research
conducted by Deci and Ryan in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. These psychologists are
currently considered the preeminent researchers in the field of SDT. Deci first wrote on this
topic in 1971 when he studied intrinsic motivation; however it was not until the 1980’s that SDT
became an accepted theory with the advancement of multiple studies examining the correlation
between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These scholars determined that individuals need
three motivating factors to be intrinsically engaged in an activity: (a) competence; (b) the need
to feel good at doing something; (c) connectedness with other people involved in an activity and
control and choice over the goals of the activity. Deci and Ryan (1999) determined that, to
increase an individual’s self-motivation to participate in an activity, all three of these factors of
intrinsic values must be activated. An important component of this research is that intrinsic
motivation has been found to have a profound impact on learning. Thus the creation or
destruction of situations and learning environments that enable such motivation is of value for
educators (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The work of Deci and Ryan was further developed by multiple scholars -- Guthrie and Alvermann, (1999), Guthrie (2008), Smith and Wilhelm (2004), Bandura (1997), Wigfield & Guthrie (1997), and Lattanzi (2014).

**Tenets of SDT**

As previously stated, motivation is essential for humans to become engaged in tasks; and motivation has falls on a spectrum of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Early research into what would later become known as SDT began in the 1950s when scholars discovered that, in many organisms, even when there was no possibility of reward or pleasure, living creatures engaged in activities for curiosity and amusement (Ryan & Deci, 1999). This research built on the work of B. F. Skinner’s stimulus response theory (SRT) (Culatta, 2015). Skinner contended that all actions are inspired by some kind of reward from the very real reward of money to a more abstract concept of the reward being the action itself (Ryan & Deci, 1999). The work of Skinner was subscribed within into cause and reaction causality; thus, researchers sought to explore “what basic needs are satisfied by intrinsically motivated behaviors” (Ryan & Deci 1999, p. 57). The desire to identify these behaviors was a core foundational piece that led to the scholarship of Deci and Ryan, who focused their research on psychological needs. These scholars established that competence (feeling effective and having autonomy) and being in charge of one's actions and relatedness (feeling understood and connected to others) as key components of SDT.

Deci and Ryan (1999), the preeminent researchers in the field of SDT, determined that, within the components of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, variables fall into the abovementioned categories. Deci and Ryan (1999) suggested that educators must ask their students at times to complete tasks that are not always going to tap into the intrinsic motivation
of their pupils; they documented that understanding the subtle differences between extrinsic motivation from the forced participation model to the lens of understanding that the activity in question has “value or utility” (1999, p. 55) would add depth to classroom instruction. They later established that intrinsic motivation aligned with autonomy. When considering the elements of SDT and the subtle variants of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, scholars have found that the impact of reading pedagogy through a readers workshop model is effective. The three components of SDT form a viable model to use to understand the effects of a methodology for teaching literacy. The level of autonomy afforded in the readers workshop model allows students to independently select books they wish to read; it promotes competence when students are all exposed to higher order thinking skills and when they can act upon them at their independent levels of reading and comprehension. It simultaneously permits relatedness because pupils and teachers create a community with reading partners and classmates in a supportive environment. This study explores these outcomes through an intervention, which was analyzed through the lens of SDT.

SDT is compelling because, within the field of motivational research, scholars concur that behavior that seeks to find achievement in a given field involves “an interaction between situational variables and the individual subject's motivation to achieve” (Rabideau, 2005). Researchers contend that extrinsic motivation is often the result of deliberate choices made to fulfill an external need, whereas intrinsic desires are unconscious choices made to meet a desirable or worthwhile objective.

Some psychologists have suggested that a possible adverse consequence of viewing behavior and learning through this lens is that, when ego becomes involved in task performances, some individuals will develop “task avoidance” (Rabideau, 2005). Another possible counter
argument for employing SDT is that, when individuals become aware they are being observed and evaluated while completing tasks (something that teachers are compelled to do often), they commonly display a “lower sense of self-determination, and as a result, are less intrinsically motivated” (Ormrod, 2008 as cited in Childs, 2014). Ryan and Deci (1999) also found this to be the case -- they contended that an individual can “undermine their sense of self-determination simply by imaging that others may be evaluating their performance” (Ryan and Deci, 1999 Ryan, 1982 as cited in Childs, 2014).

Despite these counter arguments regarding the value of SDT, this researcher determined that this theory offered the best vantage point to view the problem of practice of low reading engagement in young males within a classroom setting. This framework allowed the researcher the most purposeful inspection of the impact of the shift in teaching practices. It also allowed her to analyze the communities teachers build in their classrooms beyond increasing test scores but through engagement with students to develop enjoyment of reading. Other researchers have used this theory when examining reading comprehension, engagement, competence, and performance (Guthrie et al., 2007; Wigfield, 1997; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Wigfield et al., 2008) to gain insight into what creates the desire to engage with text.

This study sought to understand, through the perceptions of teachers, how young male students experience a shift in pedagogical practice in reading. It adapted the lens of SDT to shed light on the impact of instructional practices. The key components of SDT -- autonomy, relatedness, and connectedness – combined to provide a filter to identify if these core elements were present in students’ learning experiences. Teachers were given the opportunity to examine their practices by reflecting on their student’s experiences, using the lens of SDT. Thus, it was
possible to obtain a deep understanding of the classroom environment and ultimately of the learning engagements that students experienced.

Educators continually seek ways to better serve all students to improve literacy (regardless of their gender) by helping them choose books with which they can meaningfully engage and by increasing the time they have to spend reading in school. This study, inclusively, sought to examine the understandings and beliefs of teachers engaged in a readers workshop model of instruction through an SDT lens to explore the potential for connecting more students to reading through increased autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their classrooms.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

No matter where education trends take us in the next 20 years, and no matter what challenges students in the 21st century face, individuals must be literate. It is not enough to simply decode words; students must be able to think deeply about texts to be discerning readers. They must know how to question what they learn and how to determine if what they are reading is credible information. The internet is a valuable resource; however, it will only empower learning for the next generation if students can use it with discernment. Poor literacy skills not only impact individuals, but society as a whole. Individuals who leave school with poor literacy skills often find themselves living lives of marginalization with their choices for employment drastically more limited than those available to their more highly literate peers (Acosta-Ballesteros, del Pilar Osorno-del Rosal, & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2014; Fisher & Schneider, 2007).

In the last fifteen years, evidence has increasingly suggested that boys and young males are being turned off and turned away from developing literacy skills. Indeed, as reported by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), male readers are routinely scoring lower than their female peers in reading engagement and reading comprehension; they also show less intrinsic motivation to read (Brozo et al., 2014; Katz et al., 2005). Of course, not all boys avoid reading, and not all girls are achieving in this area (Henry, Lagos, & Berndt, 2012). However, enough of a discrepancy exists in between male and female students to make this continuing disparity in achievement a major concern for scholars and practitioners alike.

To investigate the factors that might contribute to the discrepancy in reading attainment between genders, this study sought to unearth both obstacles that are self-imposed and those which externally affect the reading lives of young male students. The researcher sought data to
inform reading pedagogy in elementary school settings in an effort to understand and narrow this achievement discrepancy.

**The Setting**

As Roskos and Neuman (2013) asserted, “If we want students to read like detectives then we need to create places where they can explore, read and interact like literate citizens” (p. 471). Instead of this ideal scenario characterizing hundreds of classrooms worldwide, most students are subjected to skill and drill pedagogies to learn how to read. Unfortunately, those students who fail to learn to read proficiently through these methods are the very ones subjected to increased isolated skill instruction. Unimaginative texts used in this approach to instruction too often fail to engage the most fragile of students. These texts are constructed to introduce particular vocabulary in a rote manner; they do not engage young readers with rich dialogue; therefore, these students miss the chance of developing and expanding their conceptual learning skills (Long, 2004). As such we have a problem that continues to be piled upon when considering young disengaged male readers. The very ones who are struggling to find entry into the world of literature are the ones being limited by the instructional practices they are subjected to, to find that very window of opportunity.

Even though research has documented that communication (Crafton, Brennan, & Silvers, 2007), motivation (Marinak, 2013; Schwabe, McElvany, & Trendtel, 2015), and explicit modeling of what it takes to be a reader are essential to teaching literacy, these aspects are often excluded in the teaching of reading. The new American international school that was the focus of this study did not have these critical pieces of communication and motivation explicitly articulated within its philosophy of literacy instruction.
To elaborate, classrooms at the school before the 2014/15 school year did not have libraries and were dependent on the system of basal readers and accompanying workbooks. New library resources did arrive in 2014; however, in most cases, these were not being used effectively. The teachers were not confident in using the new materials and were unaware of best practices in reading instruction. Many teachers were using an outdated and ineffectual methodology to teach reading, which was compounding the problem of engaging all students in developing literacy skills. The need to change the approach to teaching reading at the school was obvious, and school leaders examined classroom practices closely, embarking on taking the necessary steps to address the inadequacies in the institution’s reading pedagogy.

The International School Dilemma

Like many other international schools, the study site hosts students of many different nationalities, which added to the challenges teachers faced in engaging reluctant readers. Students from at least 90 countries are enrolled at the school, and their parents have vastly different concepts of what good reading instruction should involve. The diversity of parental opinions regarding pedagogical practices added to the strain of making a shift to more constructivist approaches to reading instruction; parents were most familiar with the “drill and skill” approach characteristic of their own educational journeys. While some commonality existed amongst the teachers (most were North American), their approaches to reading instruction were diverse, and this variety impacted the ease with which the shift in pedagogical practices occurred. At the time the study was conducted, of the homeroom teachers in grades one through five, only five of 35 teachers had not been educated in North America. High staff turnover in international schools constitutes another factor contributing to difficulty in implementing successful shifts in pedagogy in these settings (Chandler, 2010).
It is important to recognize that shifts in instructional practice within international schools must pass not only through the lens of the relevant accreditation bodies under which the school operates, but also through the local educational authority. In this case, the school had to meet mandated requirements for Arab national students to attend additional classes in Arabic and Islamic studies. It also needed to manage difficult parameters regarding gender stereotypes, an issue that is significant in both public and private schools in the country. The school that was the focus of this study additionally had to process all changes in pedagogy and curriculum through the accreditation procedures of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years program (IB PYP), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and the Council of International Schools. The school was simultaneously under pressure to uphold its reputation of offering the highest quality of pedagogy that American education has to offer. Indeed, the school, even though its scope and curriculum were structured under the principals of the IB PYP program, also utilized the American Education Reaches Out (AERO) standards and benchmarks which are based on the common core standards used in the United States.

The students from more than 90 nationalities attending the school were drawn to this institution because it was grounded in an American approach to education. This identity is important in the international school setting. Within the local community, many other educational establishments offer very distinct educational experiences based on a national curriculum from, most commonly, Britain or India. This clarity of philosophical and educational grounding was important not only to students and parents who were expatriates, but also to local families who wanted their children to have a more international and “Western” educational experience. At the time this study was conducted, only 22% of the student body was categorized as “other than” an expatriate dependent.
The Significance

Further investigation into the discovery of the factors that contribute to the discrepancy of reading outcomes for students along gender lines was justified at this institution; the disparate achievements between boys and girls had prevailed for approximately fifteen years with little to no shift in closing the gap. The need to examine alternative teaching strategies that had the potential to impact motivation and therefore engagement in reading for boys was stark (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Bausch, 2007; Brozo & Flynt, 2007; Bryan, 1999; Durik et al., 2006; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Reutzel et al., 2014; Velluto & Barbousas, 2013). This researcher sought to determine if there was any correlation between achievement and pedagogy, relying on past studies that explored how gender (Below, Skinner, Fearrington & Sorrell, 2010; Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Lynn & Mikk, 2009; Senn, 2012; Sokal et al., 2009) and reading material (Brozo, 2012; Reutzel et al., 2014; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Young & Brozo, 2001; Zambo, 2007) intersect and affect the attitudes and beliefs of male students as they engage in reading.

The Problem Statement

As teachers and administrators are tasked to find ways to engage all students in the reading process, more knowledge about what impacts male students as they encounter texts in school is needed. This study was devised to investigate if a change in the reading methodologies of elementary teachers at an international American curriculum school to a more inclusive and purposeful approach—a readers workshop—could highlight factors affecting the development of literacy skills amongst male readers. The IPA methodology sought to understand the beliefs and experiences of teachers who engage daily with students and to examine first-hand the dynamics of disparity in attainment between male and female learners. The data generated by this undertaking could have implications not only for teachers and administrators in the international
school setting, but also for other educators facing this gendered inconsistency in achievement; the gap is not specific to any country or socio-economic situation. All educators are faced with the same challenge of finding ways to close the achievement gap in literacy between boys and girls.

The following literature review was conducted to outline current thinking on how males learn and to explore which teaching strategies have the most potential to reach reluctant male readers. The survey of the literature also looked at the role gender and gender stereotypes play in the learning environment. Additionally, the review examined reading material, gender perceptions of young males, and teaching strategies.

The themes that emerged from the review of the literature highlight a need to examine the practices of teaching reading more thoroughly. While a need exists to make learning processes more explicit, misconceptions regarding how to deliver such knowledge persist. Many school districts have adopted core *basal* readers, which scholars have found alienate young male and other struggling readers. The dry and unappealing texts which command “evidence-based” learning have been critiqued for not engaging or appealing to struggling students who are more likely to participate in the reading process if they are given choice and a voice in the material they are asked to read. This literature review also highlighted research examining the effect teacher perceptions of gender and males own perceptions of themselves have on a reading classroom. The literature revealed that young boys are not unwilling to participate in reading; the way reading is typically taught, however, and the texts used, do not effectively engage them.

The review first presents research and ideas that discuss how teaching strategies can impact male reading achievement through motivation and engagement. An examination of how gender roles influence male images of reading and thus their willingness to engage with texts
follows. Finally, the review analyzes literature exploring the influence of reading material on male reading engagement.

**Reading and Engaging the Boys**

**Motivation and Teaching**

The “boy” question or concern in regards to reading is not a new phenomenon. Ayers in 1909 (as cited in Below, Skinner, Fearrington, & Sorrell, 2010) discussed the differences in achievement in reading between young males and females; yet in 2016, educators were still challenged with addressing this discrepancy:

> For as long as there have been schools there have been boys who would rather be elsewhere: “and then the whining schoolboy with his satchel and shiny morning face creeping like a snail unwillingly to school. (Jacques in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*).”

(Brozo, 2011, p. 11)

Motivation (or the lack of it) has contributed significantly to the unwillingness of male students to engage with the written word (Katz et al., 2005). Additionally, scholars have identified that many boys do not affirm the value of being in school, do not like to read, and do not perceive an applicable use of reading in their lives (Bausch, 2007). This raises the question as to what is happening in classrooms to not motivate boys to see the value of education -- reading in particular. Because this lack of engagement by many boys is not new, current methods of instruction in the United States and beyond (for example, the Common Core driven learning environment) cannot be named as the sole factor contributing to this phenomenon. Indeed, as Bausch (2007) suggested, the achievement level of young male students in literacy has remained static “for more than 30 years” (Bausch, 2007, p. 199).
Wilhelm and Smith, (2014), and Marinak (2013) have attested to the need to build motivation in young readers. They concurred that an intrinsic part of building this motivation is derived from creating choice in the classrooms. These authors have asserted that providing opportunities for authentic, challenging learning with clear goals that students see the value in, rather than trite learning that students do not positively accept, contributes to motivation. Marinak (2013) articulated that the reading program itself is not necessarily the factor that enhances motivation; rather the tasks assigned to create that motivation require further examination (Hudson & Williams, 2015). Open-ended tasks that offer at least a modicum of control to students are most effective in building connections to the text. Indeed, educators must be cognizant that even though students are compelled to take more and more standardized tests to prove competency, when students do not engage with texts in authentic meaningful ways, schools will produce youth that appear to be proficient with reading but who in reality have no willingness to read and who do not deeply understand the value of reading in their worlds (Applegate & Applegate, 2010).

Motivation is built on feeling confident. Research has documented that male students have less intrinsic motivation to read than their female peers (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Senn, 2012). However, when self-beliefs are examined, both genders believe that they have similar reading competencies (Gambrell, 2015; Marinak, 2013; Pecjak & Peklaj, 2006, as cited in Applegate & Applegate, 2010). Indeed Durik et al. (2006) determined across multiple grade levels that gender was a determining factor in students’ reading success. Their study found that “girls valued reading and English more than boys did” (Durik et al., 2006, p. 392) and that this value was tied to the need to show competence in the skill of reading (Durik et al., 2006; Wilhelm & Smith, 2014). This need for self-belief or competence in reading led Wilhelm and
Smith (2014) to criticize components of the Common Core which they contended does not allow competence and thus motivation to evolve.

Therefore, the need to carefully examine the teaching practices that surround reading has become increasingly pertinent. Commonly used teaching practices such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) which, while valuable to students who are competent and articulate readers, do nothing for those students who are disengaged and struggling (Bryan, 1999; Velluto & Barbousas, 2013). When students are asked to read in silence, the possibilities for reflection, connection, and modeling are substantially diminished. Students need opportunities to engage in sharing with others in authentic dialog around texts, not in prescriptive literature circles (Porath, 2014). The type of learning where teachers and students model and describe their thinking processes around reading allows students to access content with greater efficacy (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

Bausch (2007) took this concept of meaningful conversations further when she suggested that teachers engaging with reluctant male readers should become more cognizant of what is actually said rather than how it is said. This, she contended, would help honor those students who “will be left out, disengaged and/or discouraged” (Bausch, 2007, p. 215). Subsequent research established that engagement with reading is significantly impacted when students are given the opportunity to interact with peers in ways that allow them to identify real world applications for the skill of reading (Gambrell, 2015)

An integral part of conversations around texts is the need to provide time for self-reflection (Fives et al., 2014). This process has been documented to be vital to helping students build their self-esteem, which is an essential component of motivation, especially in male pupils (Senn, 2012). The time needed for such reflections is unfortunately something that often gets
left out of the learning opportunities for many students in the time-pressured world of standardized testing. Without this reflective time, students are not provided with the chance to acknowledge what they are doing well and what they need to improve on. Research has established that schools that follow an inquiry-based curriculum often have this type of reflection built into teaching practices. The IB PYP makes this type of reflection an essential piece of curriculum design and delivery.

Ultimately, the need to involve students in their own learning process is essential; otherwise students become recipients of knowledge rather than active participants engaged in the quest for understanding (Au & Carroll, 1997). Analyzing components of reading instruction, Porath (2014) pointed out that a fundamental element of the readers workshop approach is to encourage students to do this very reflection; it requires, however, that teachers “talk less, and listen more” (Porath, 2014, p. 634). Perhaps this constitutes a new approach to teaching. Allowing students to be dynamically engaged in their own learning is critical if educators hope to engage reluctant readers. However, teachers must be given freedom from strictly adhering to prescribed reading lessons and activities thrust upon them from outside agencies (Applegate & Applegate, 2010). Research conducted in New Zealand that looked at the impact of support for teachers as they sought to raise literacy in schools addressed the need to build trust and collaboration in closing achievement gaps (Fletcher, Greenwood, Grimley & Parkhill, 2011). When schools focused on supporting teachers in finding ways to engage students in reading through professional development opportunities and collaboration, trust was established, and teachers improved reading competency because the focus was shifted from accountability to the needs of the students (Fletcher, et al., 2011).
As technology is ever more present in classrooms, the impact of online reading cannot be dismissed as a factor when considering the learning experiences of reluctant male readers. Today’s students grew up surrounded by technology and are often unwittingly immersed in reading as a by-product of their online activities. Students who are unwilling or reluctant to engage with the prescribed texts of their schools curriculum can find authentic opportunities for reading through the myriad of sites that are available on the web. Blackburn (2003), in an analysis of how technology can assist in reaching reluctant male readers, argued that a shift in teacher thinking is required, and that teachers must reconsider the skills that students bring with them to school. What is important to consider is that the technological competence of young students can potentially be a motivating factor and a compelling piece of the literacy success puzzle for boys (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014).

Technology can and should be used to provide meaningful and vital learning opportunities for student learning. However what the literature shows is that, even with more and more exposure to technology through the use of multiple resources such as tablets and computers, reading proficiency across the genders is constant (Huang, Liang, & Chiu, 2013; Sokal & Katz, 2008; Wu, 2014).

Thus, it becomes urgent to look at how reading instruction is being carried out. The way students are engaged and challenged within the classroom regarding both pedagogy and materials is a dynamic factor impacting the discrepancies between boys and girls in attaining proficiency in reading (Reutzel et al., 2014; Watson & Kehler, 2012). Students must be engaged with active and authentic learning opportunities. Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, and Tower (2006) defined authentic reading as “that which mirrors the reading activities that occur in everyday life” (as cited in Hudson & Williams, 2015, p. 533). When classrooms provide such
opportunities for reading, reticent male students take significant steps forward to motivate themselves to read.

**Gender**

Globally, data on reading competency confirms that boys are underperforming compared to their female peers (Brozo et al., 2007). Are boys wired differently? If so, is that why we have this global occurrence of underperforming males when it comes to reading? Data from PISA in 2009 concluded that female students were more engaged and read a wider variety of print than their male classmates (Brozo et al., 2007). In addition, the OECD (2003) “released its three-year study of knowledge and skills of males and females in 35 industrialized countries (including the United States, Canada, the European countries, Australia, and Japan). Girls outperformed boys in every country” (Gurian & Stevens, 2004). The components of this study that most negatively impacted male participants were reading and writing, which confirmed the need to uncover the factors contributing to these discrepancies.

Research has proposed that male and female brains may indeed be wired differently and may process information presented in school in alternate ways (Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Spironelli, Penolazzi, & Angrilli, 2010). Medical equipment has allowed data to be collected that shows the different parts of the brain that become engaged during the learning process. The areas of the brain activated differ between the genders but remain constant across cultures, despite social norms and expectations varying greatly from country to country. This information has provided researchers with empirical evidence revealing that boys and girls learn differently (Gurian & Stevens, 2004) and that their brains develop at different rates: “[C]ertain areas of the brain do not develop to the same degree in one gender as compared to the other” (Senn, 2012).
Even with this recognition of the different wiring and development of the brains of boys and girls, both are expected to learn the same way in our modern school systems.

This knowledge that boys and girls learn and process information differently inspired the University of Missouri-Kansas City to investigate the impact of gender training for teachers. In a study conducted from 1998-2000, researchers sought to determine what would help educators better understand the learning needs of both sexes. The goal of the research was not to exclude either sex from being engaged in school; it aimed to make a difference in the learning outcomes of all students (Gurian & Stevens, 2004).

The Kansas City study was conducted in a low-performing elementary school, which, after a training intervention was implemented, moved from last place in the district to routinely placing in the top two slots. This research inspired other school districts as far as Alabama to adopt similar training for teachers; other universities also acknowledged the significance of the study. In addition to a substantial rise in student academic outcomes, a decline in disciplinary issues also ensued. This suggested that understanding how the brains of youth differ along gender lines not only facilitates learning, but it can help educators understand the varied learning styles of students as suggested by Gardner (2011).

Considering the impact of the differences in brain wiring and development between genders, the literature repeatedly shows that an enormous discrepancy exists between the learning styles and pace of girls and boys. When other issues were taken into account -- learning disorders, discipline referrals, diagnosis of ADD/ADHD, school dropout, and incarceration -- males were far more affected than females. Additionally, male college attendance is now on the decline compared to female engagement (Brozo, 2011; Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Senn, 2012; Zambo, 2007). These factors require us to consider if schools and
other educational institutions are indeed serving both genders sufficiently. While, some might dismiss brain wiring as an excuse for male students to continue to act in a stereotypical masculine manner, the evidence indicates that in some way boys are disserved by schools and a need exists to find solutions to resolve these discrepancies in the data.

Senn (2012) examined brain development and the impact it has on student outcomes, noting that male brains produce less of a substance known as serotonin. Serotonin has been shown in gender research to contribute to the fact that boys are more fidgety and more in need of constant movement, a characteristic which does not naturally fit into the quiet world of a stereotypical reading class. This further emphasizes the need for teachers to be aware of the physiological differences of their male and female students, an assertion supported by Gurian and Stevens (2004) who detailed the need for teachers to be more aware of the varying needs of male and female students.

Senn (2012) also contended that, because male and female brains develop at differing rates, there should be little surprise when male students flounder when they enter new kindergarten classes which are highly academically focused. Male students entering kindergarten at just five years may be being set up for failure because their young brains are not processing information in the same way as their female counterparts, particularly in the area of literacy. (Catsambis et al., 2012). Catsambis et al. (2012) have also documented that the strong focus on academics in kindergarten sets up gender differences in reading outcomes, particularly when the system places students in groups according to ability. This placement of pupils quite possibly favors females who typically arrive in school with more reading readiness. (Ready, Burkam, & Lee, 2005, as cited in Catsambis et al., 2012). Students placed in lower ability groups are then, from the onset of their integration into school, not exposed to the higher
thinking skills of their peers; this automatically presents them with an academic handicap which needs to be overcome (Catsambis et al, 2012). The literature supports the idea that more play-based learning in kindergarten could provide support to male students and mitigate discrepancies in learning.

Positive impacts in academic outcomes have been documented in countries like Finland and Australia where worksheets and desks have been replaced by hands-on learning activities for all (Morgan, 2014; Ridgway & Quinones, 2012; Sahlberg, 2007; Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, & Hämäläinen, 2006;). These changes allow time for the young male brains to catch up with the information being presented to them.

Research has documented that young males need to feel successful at activities they undertake to willingly to engage with reading (Senn, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Wilhelm & Smith, 2014). This can result in boys not challenging themselves to explore new titles and authors with intricate plots and story lines. This avoidance may prevent boys from experiencing success with reading and can lead them to become “even less competent” (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004, p. 456). However, scholars have noted that when male students felt that they could make improvements in a particular activity related to literacy, they were willing to keep working at the activity to acquire the desired level of proficiency (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004). This confirms the need to see that the value of the activity is essential for many male students. In short, they must develop “buy in” to avoid “failure and frustration” (Senn, 2012) and, perhaps be allowed to read short and easy texts. Smith and Wilhelm (2004) discovered that boys responded positively to immediate and concrete feedback to the activity assigned. This allowed male students to understand their competence and thus they increased their capacity to comprehend the work on hand and to succeed.
The literature documents that males may perceive reading as a female pastime (Senn, 2012; Sokal et al., 2009; Zambo, 2007). This mindset may impact the willingness of boys to work towards attaining the requisite skills for reading because reading may not fit into their vision of what it means to be a male (Scholes, 2010). This self-regulation by young boys then sets into motion a circular pattern of disconnection with texts. The unwillingness to try to read then means that those who read continually improve, while those who do not remain static in their skill level, or they regress. This lack of engagement or reluctance to participate in reading is commonly linked to boys’ perceptions that reading has little to no value in their world (Zambo, 2007).

In an attempt to offset this self-debilitating mindset, the literature suggests that schools should include books in their classrooms that have appealing male characters and/or gender specific books, which have proven to effectively engage hesitant male readers (Brozo, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2012; McGeown, 2015; Zambo, 2007). While this may be seen by some as extending hegemonic male behavior, Watson, Kehler, and Martino (2010) suggested that including such books in our classrooms opens up the possibilities for conversations around gender. The authors claimed that when students are provided learning spaces where both “boys and girls are free to engage” both genders “improve their literacy skills without fear of social and cultural repercussions” (Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010, p. 360). In this context, the opportunity for deconstructing reading as a strictly feminine agenda can occur, and the chance of engaging more boys in reading is created.

Similarly, Entwisle et al. (2007) argued that the inclusion of books with strong male characters, especially for students of low socioeconomic status, can potentially help counter the negative and dismissive message these students may receive from role models that learning and
education have no value. The authors contended that, because students arrive in school with varying messages of excepted school norms, depending on the economic standing of their families, providing such reading material to young boys allows them to see themselves reflected within the text and to begin building the desire to be involved with the world of books. Scholes (2010) concurred with this argument; her research found that, especially boys from families of low socioeconomic status, identified reading as a “criteria or benchmark for demarcating ‘uncool’ students” (Scholes, 2010, p. 443).

When considering the impact of gender on reading attainment in schools, it is important to reflect on the fact that not since the inequality of female education drew strong attention in the latter part of the 20th Century has there been such a determined focus on any particular gender in schools (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Some scholars have argued that the trends described above do not necessarily represent a “boy” crisis, but they rather reflect the fact that girls have not only caught up with boys in their education but have significantly overtaken them due to access to more equitable learning opportunities (Mead, 2006, as cited in Matthews et al., 2009). However, what is important to consider is that more boys than girls will be expelled, held back, suspended, or will drop out, (Matthews et al., 2009) which supports the position that there is indeed a boy “crisis.”

Research that might shed light on why this is the case argues that self-regulatory behavior is a critical asset as students move through elementary school (Matthews et al., 2009; Below, Skinner, Fearrington, & Sorrell, 2010). The ability to positively control one's self in a classroom has been determined to impact a student's journey through school. This is largely because this control allows an individual to interact socially with peers, absorb information, and establish a relationship with a teacher who sees a student who is ready to learn. Thus male development,
which has been shown to be different to that of females, does not tend to fit into many classrooms. Indeed, Below et al. (2010) found that this discrepancy in self-regulation was magnified as students moved from kindergarten to second grade, which represents the very grade span where reading is introduced and then solidified as a skill. Catsambis et al. (2012) echoed these findings in their research which found that the behavior of a student in kindergarten tended to have a significant impact on their placement within ability groupings.

In their research on self-regulation, Below et al. (2010) determined that further investigation is needed to determine if and when male students can catch up with their female peers in regards to this behavioral aspect. They suggested that future studies should explore what factors can be built into schools that might support male students as they develop these skills.

The gender of teachers and the promotion of single-sex schools have also garnered some attention as a way for educational establishments to close the gender attainment gap. However, several studies have determined that it not the sex of the teacher or the sex of the classmates that makes the most difference in learning for students (Helbig, 2012; Hubbard & Datnow, 2005; Scholes, 2010; Sokal et al., 2009). Instead, authentic interactions with perceived caring instructors and teachers had the most impact on student learning. When students felt heard, valued, and cared for in a safe environment, then the learning occurred regardless of the gender of the teacher or of fellow pupils.

What can be established from the literature is that narrow self-imposed concepts of gender can serve to hinder a male student as he begins his literary life. The apparent disposition by male students to need to feel good at doing something or to feel potential competence, negatively impacts how they approach learning and, in particular, reading. While male students
are bound by their biology, schools and places of learning can acknowledge these differences exist and not penalize boys as they struggle to catch up physiologically with their female peers. By adjusting their pedagogy to include all and by not advantaging either gender, teachers can make significant strides in bringing boys into the world of books.

**Reading Material**

When considering all the nuances that impact reading achievement amongst male students, reading materials are often considered last. Across the country, canonized texts – or the “must reads” of childhood -- appear time and time again in elementary classrooms. However, what is frequently not acknowledged is that numerous studies have indicated that boys and girls read and enjoy different material (Brozo, 2011; Senn, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Young & Brozo, 2001). The literature reveals that females tend to read more books about relationships and romance, while boys tend to read for information on topics such as biographies, sports, and science (Brozo, 2012; Senn, 2012). However, rarely are the books that appeal to young male readers seen or celebrated in classrooms. The books that are intended to share a message and which students are expected to analyze commonly include Caldecott Medal winners, not works like Dave Pilkey’s (1997) *Capt. Underpants*, which appeals to male humor and involves characters that are attractive to boys.

Senn (2012) contended that teachers must be willing to consider other options for reading when teaching reluctant males. She asserted that even though graphic novels are immensely popular with young students, especially boys (Brozo, 2012), they are often placed on the list of what is considered “bad literature.” Teachers should be willing to look at many alternatives, such as newspapers and magazines, as alternates for capturing the imagination of young boy readers (Brozo, 2011; Wilhelm & Smith, 2014). What appeals to boy readers is seemingly
consistent across cultures. As pointed out by the Clark (2012), who conducted an inquiry into in the United Kingdom regarding what appealed to male readers, boys characteristically chose non-fiction, comic books, and action-adventure themed texts. The study determined that both boys and girls need to feel that what they are reading matters and that texts are relevant to their experiences. Indeed Senn (2012) suggested that boys often read to extend or solidify pre-existing knowledge, which corresponds to their need to feel they are “being good at something.” Thus, when students are given no choice over the texts they are assigned, and when the texts do not appeal to them, a recipe for disengagement is present.

For educators challenged with finding ways to draw young boys into reading, the idea of providing books that contain multiple archetypes is appealing (Young & Brozo, 2001; Zambo, 2007). In this sense, because so many ways of being a man exist, it is important that classroom libraries contain stories that “portray archetypes in traditional and nontraditional roles, with common and varying lifestyles” (Zambo, 2007, p. 127). This type of literature creates an opportunity for teachers and students alike to challenge hegemonic male stereotypes within in the classroom. This can potentially assist in de-gendering reading, something that Scholes (2010) found encouraged boys to read more.

As librarians and teachers consider which books to acquire, it is imperative to remember that scholars have not recommended the creation of female or male curricula, or female or male libraries, but rather options for reading that do not favor either gender (Young & Brozo, 2001; Zambo, 2007). Girls or boys should not be limited in their reading choices to fit preconceived gender ideals. While some may object to the inclusion of books in schools that portray boys in stereotypical activities, if thoughtful and meaningful discussions accompany the reading of such
texts, then alternate perspectives on these activities can be introduced and analyzed, thus providing boys with different viewpoints.

Just as it is important for boys to see their interests and lives reflected in texts, it is equally essential that the diverse cultural backgrounds of students are represented in the literature they read. Scholars have documented the importance of seeing one's image reflected back from the words and images within books, especially for students of color and for those youngsters who are not part of the dominant culture (Katz et al., 2005). Wood & Jocius (2013) attested to the power of images that accurately reflect the lives of readers, arguing that texts are “mirrors which validate and reflect the cultural norms and values of the reader, and windows, which juxtapose the familiar with the unfamiliar, allowing readers to glimpse into another culture” (Bishop, 1990, as cited in Wood & Jocius, 2013, p. 664).

Despite their emphasis on the value of seeing portrayals of all students within the books schools promote, Wood & Jocius (2013) simultaneously cautioned that educators need to carefully consider if reading materials are patronizing in the assumptions they make about the readers, avoiding books that “reinforce negative stereotypes” (Wood & Jocius, 2013, p. 665). Without a doubt, students seeing themselves reflected in what they read is an affirming experience; these connections allow the reader to make a more profound connection to text, which helps build critical reading skills.

This connection is of particular significance when considering that “there is an undeniable achievement gap separating black males and their peers” (Wood & Jocius, 2013, p. 661). According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2011, “African American males in grade 4 [had] the second lowest reading comprehensive scale score” (Wood & Jocius, 2013, p. 661). When these boys do not experience success with reading, they perceive that their potential
for being held back, diagnosed with learning disabilities, or placed in special education class increases dramatically. Of course, just by using books that portray different student ethnicities will not address the significant achievement gap between boys of color and their peers. However, if it has the potential to make even the smallest difference in their learning experiences, then it must become a priority.

In summary, the content of the books presented to boys is a crucial determinant in their willingness to read; it affects their ability to develop reading skills. One primary goal of educating students is to help them become life-long learners. If boys are shut out of the world of reading because adults deem what they want to read is unimportant, we will have limited their potential not only in school but for future educational opportunities. Acknowledgment of what genres and topics engage male students is required if educators seek to address gendered imbalances in reading outcomes. As mentioned before, this perspective does not attempt to create classroom libraries that are slanted to benefit one gender over the other; rather, the objective is to provide ample choices for all and to make sure boys and girls alike can access books that engage them as enthusiastic and critical readers. As Brozo et al. observed (2014), if this issue is not addressed, particularly in an era of Common Core State Standards, what will result are “greater achievement gaps based on economic privilege, race and gender” (Haskins, Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012, as cited in Brozo et al., 2014).

**Summary**

The discrepancy in reading outcomes between boys and girls is not limited to one country or culture. It is an occurrence that spans the globe, and it characterizes traditional and progressive school systems alike. Despite the body of evidence supporting this assertion, efforts to remedy the situation are sorely lacking. No mandated policy has been formulated in the
United States to address this gender gap (Brozo et al., 2014). Arguments exist that too much attention has been given to low male achievement rates in literacy, and that these scores, rather than being indicative of the lowering of male performance, simply constitute evidence of females overtaking the males academically. Nevertheless, research has shown that males and females process information differently, learn differently, and find different topics interesting to read. This knowledge does not mean that one gender should be disadvantaged at the expense of the other. Just because boys do not find the traditional school texts as appealing as their female peers does not mean that schools cannot find resources that will capture the imaginations of male readers. If we fail to recognize these differences, more boys will likely be diagnosed with learning disorders or be given medication as they attempt to find their way through school. Disinterest in reading by boys does not necessarily mean a child has a learning disability; perhaps certain texts have little to no appeal to certain students, which disengages them from the process of reading.

In the end, by creating choice in the books and resources provided to students, both boys and girls can benefit. This does not constitute an argument for male or female curriculums; educators must simply be aware of the different approaches and interests each gender brings to the classroom. Until we have that knowledge, and until we offer a variety of frameworks with which boys can identify, we risk leading boys to uncritically adopt traits of hegemonic masculinity or to disengage with the crucial process of reading altogether.

As such, a pressing need exists to explore and expand the literature that examines the effects of various pedagogical styles on the development of the reading skills of males. As the research indicated, future studies are needed that address both how teachers can have a positive effect on the attainment of reading skills by males, and the perceptions educators and boys have
of reading. Research in this area could provide insights into effective mechanisms that could support teachers as they make shifts in their learning styles to accommodate the needs of all their students; it could also shed light on how young males navigate the nuances of reading classes in an environment characterized by high expectations. This data could give those who organize and support professional staff development information to justify a shift in pedagogical practices. Indeed, if educators are to effectively teach all the students, they must not be limited by a lack of ideas and concepts (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014).

This literature review supported this study examining the understandings and beliefs of teachers actively engaged in teaching young male students to read. It aimed to discover what is known about the ways in which educators are acknowledging and supporting the idiosyncrasies of male students who are navigating the hurdles of literacy in classrooms that increasingly place more and more demands on them. This issue is crucial because unconnected and narrow literacy assessments often determine the fate of boys at school. Boys and girls learn and process differently. However, these differences do not mean that male students need to be held back, placed in special education classes, or diagnosed as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Boys need a classroom that will provide them with a safe place to experiment with a variety of texts and will help them to engage with the written word so that they can become lifelong readers able to access the world of knowledge.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how teachers in a school where a purposeful shift to a readers workshop model of instruction occurred understood and believed about this experience for young boys. In seeking to reach this goal, this study employed a qualitative methodology.

The power of qualitative research lies in engaging with those directly involved with a phenomenon and constructing or interpreting their lived experiences so that sense making arises from within the context of the investigation (Creswell, 2013). This sense making is extremely valuable within the context of this study because it aimed to hear the voices of those charged with engaging reluctant males in reading. Through these teachers, it sought to understand the lived experiences of young boys attending an international American school. Qualitative research methodology provides an opportunity to study issues or occurrences in a contextualized manner. Qualitative research also provides the opportunity to investigate an issue in its natural setting, which this researcher determined would enhance the value of the findings. When study participants can talk to investigators in familiar territory, rather than in a contrived laboratory setting, their responses tend to be more reflective of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). As Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) noted, “qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth” (p. 31). This capacity to work closely with small groups of participants aligned with the goals of this research project, which
included understanding the practice of teachers at the study site as they began to implement a shift in instructional practices.

Characteristic of qualitative research, this study did not test a hypothesis. Instead, by giving teachers actively engaged in daily interactions with students in the classroom an opportunity to reflect and voice their thinking through a qualitative study, the researcher created a space for these individuals to share their perspectives with others who might identify with these experiences (Seldman, 2013). Such identifications can potentially have a ripple effect that will allow others to pinpoint changes and shifts they can make in their own pedagogical practices. This is significant because, as previously noted, the disparity in reading attainment between genders is not culturally or socioeconomically based. Indeed, it is a phenomenon experienced worldwide (Watson & Kehler, 2010).

**Constructivist Paradigm**

The paradigm used for this study is constructivist, which holds that knowledge can be created by the interactive experiences and interpretations of the researcher and the individuals involved in the research. The knowledge created through this shared experience is considered of value to both the participant and the investigator (Creswell, 2013). Understandings created through a constructivist paradigm can be varied, and it is incumbent on the researcher to uncover the “complexity of views rather than narrowing meaning into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell, 2007, p. 8). Indeed, Ponterotto (2005) suggested that meaning is not always an obvious entity, but rather it must be unveiled through introspection and reflection on an occurrence, a reflection that underscores the value of the researcher in this qualitative research project based on a constructivist paradigm. By listening to the voices of the teachers in the classroom, the researcher has aimed to understand the lived experiences of children in their care.
The researcher ultimately sought to comprehend or shed light on the experiences of others through their own words and to provide a close evaluation of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

**Research Design**

This study employed an IPA approach to analyze how teachers involved in a purposeful shift in teaching reading understood the experiences of young male students. The study aimed to provide a detailed examination of this particular case (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The goal was to understand the shared lived experiences of participants as they worked through their perceptions of the consequences of a required change in pedagogical practice at their school. The researcher was involved in the interpretive process with the participants (Moustakas, 1994) and was embedded within the community being studied. She was aware of her positionality and acknowledged that adopting an IPA framework allowed for participant observation. While the researcher wished to understand the experience being examined from an insider's perspective, she also needed to question and probe to evoke other ideas and recollections from the research participants, and thus to shed light on the experience under review. IPA necessitates a “combination of phenomenological and hermeneutic insights. It is phenomenological in attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant but recognizes that this inevitably becomes an interpretative endeavor for both participant and researcher” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 37).

Thus, the task of phenomenology is “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (Heidegger, 1962 as cited in Shinebourne, 2011). The author hoped that looking at this question of male literacy engagement through an IPA lens would allow her to establish a sense of the reading lives of the male students through the perceptions and words of the teachers as “sense-making is always situated” (Larkin, Eatough, 2009).
& Osborn, 2011, p. 325). The data created at the research site, while not being highly transferable, has the potential to have an immediate impact on its locale. Thus, the opportunity to use the words of those directly involved added gravitas to the ideas that emerged. As Larkin et al. (2011) suggested, IPA research has “the potential to capture some of the more situated and meaningful aspects of human ‘Being’” (p. 330). Analyzing the interpretations of these teachers as they worked with young males potentially adds to an understanding of how young male students interact with the world of reading.

**Research Tradition**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was first identified as a research methodology in the 1990s (Smith, 1996). This approach, as outlined by Smith (2010), held that IPA was a rigorous approach to research because three areas of philosophical thought underpinned it: “phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.” Smith (2010) suggested that the rigor of this methodology stems from phenomenology, which allows an investigation into the lived “experiences” of research participants. Hermeneutics provides the avenue for interpreting the “experience” through analysis as a dual function with both the participant and the researcher. Only through interpretation is the action of lived experience reflected upon and identified. The ideography strand included in IPA “is committed to a detailed analysis of each case” (Smith, 2010, p. 186).

In the publication *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, Smith et al. (2009) delved into the work of four phenomenological philosophers -- “Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12) -- to examine how their thinking supported IPA. Husserl’s work around the examination of experience, these authors posited, added gravitas to the core concept of reflection in IPA. Heidegger supported the idea that experience is situated and must
be considered within the context of all other "experience" (Husserl & Heidegger, 1927). The work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) incorporated the concept that “experience” is always a very individual occurrence, and while others may observe and be part of it, each person feels and works with an event or emotion in a very individual way (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Additionally, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Solomon, 2006) argued that perception and interpretative thinking both play a hand in the understanding of a phenomenon. Sartre believed that reflections constitute the space where a person has a deeper and more insightful experience than the event itself. (Solomon, 2006).

Adding to the work of the phenomenological philosophers, the thinking and ideas of hermeneutics scholars Schleiermacher, Gadamer, and Heidegger contributed to the foundational building blocks of IPA (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2010). Their work underpins the importance of the “interpretative process” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22) in an IPA study. Smith et al. (2009) pointed out that Schleiermacher was writing with the interpretation of ancient texts in mind; his thinking added to the focus of interpretation within IPA (Margolis, 1987).

The third strand of IPA brings the researcher back to the concept of idiography, or to the need to focus on particular events and phenomena. This focused examination allows an in-depth analysis of both participants’ and researchers’ experiences so that each can gain an understanding of the occurrence within its naturally occurring situation. Smith et al. (2009) contended that researchers who adopt an IPA lens understand that “the lived experience of being a body-in-the-world can never be entirely captured or absorbed, but equally, must not be ignored or overlooked” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19).


**Participants**

Qualitative research participants tend to be selected more purposefully than subjects included in quantitative research endeavors (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). IPA adheres to this concept and selects participants based on the insights they bring to a particular occurrence. Indeed, participants in IPA studies tend to represent groups for whom the “research question is meaningful” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49).

Teachers who work at the international school where this problem of practice was identified, and who are actively involved with the move to a readers workshop at the international school, participated in this study. These teachers were individuals who daily delivered reading instruction to young male students while still addressing all the other benchmarks of a rich primary years program (PYP). A purposive sampling strategy was employed, as only teachers in Grades 1 or 3 were eligible for participation because they were leading the endeavor in the school. These teachers had all undergone training to build their knowledge base to implement a shift in pedagogy. A visiting literacy specialist had worked with them in spring 2016 with a focus on reading instruction.

Finding participants who were heavily embedded within the context of the problem followed the thinking of Smith et al. (2009) The aim of an IPA was to examine the personal experiences of individuals involved in the process under review using purposive sampling.

While IPA suggests that a more uniform group of participants can lead to greater insight into a problem being studied, the findings are not easily transferable to a wider audience. This limitation on transferability is due to the specificity of the findings to a particular location. However additional cases in the tradition of the IPA paradigm that provide similar data in other contexts support the transferability of the study (Smith et al., 2009).
Access

The research site selected for this study was a private IB American international school with approximately 900 students from Grade 1 to 5. This school had a highly diverse population of transient students, which added to the desirability of this site. The mobility of the student body enhanced the challenges faced in engaging reluctant males in reading, and added a more nuanced perspective of the challenges encountered in the classrooms by reading teachers. Permission from the school superintendent was obtained to interview the teachers. An email outlining the study and asking permission to carry out the desired interviews was sent, to the head of followed by a personal meeting with the researcher to reconfirm the nature of the study and clarify any issues or concerns that they may have had (see Appendix A).

Recruitment

Once permission was secured from the head of the school, participants were recruited using purposive sampling. An email (see Appendix B) was sent to teachers who were homeroom teachers, learning support, or English language teachers responsible for reading instruction in Grades 1 and 3. This email was targeted at teachers who were not new to the school in 2016. This email was sent to an initial group of eight teachers, with the goal of recruiting five to eight participants. The objective was to recruit participants who had been part of the literary journey of the school and could shed light on the validity of the changes made. The email sent to these teachers outlined the context of the study and highlighted that the only incentive offered would be the purchase of a coffee during the interview. The recipients of this email were made aware that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Additionally, in this email there was an assurance that their responses would remain confidential and that their contributions would have no bearing on their role at the school.
Once individuals had indicated their willingness to be part of the research project, they received a follow-up email (see Appendix C), which thanked them for their readiness to participate and asked them to review the consent to participate form (see Appendix D) before the researcher visited them in school. This email again outlined the research project, their right to withdraw at any time, how data was to be collected through interviews, and that all data was to be kept secured and confidential (Creswell, 2014). This document told the participant how to contact the interviewer during the project (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym that would be used during the research process, which would be known only to them and the researcher. Finally, all the participants were given a copy of the consent to participate form for their records, this form being signed by the participant and the researcher (Seidman, 2013). A short personal visit provided an opportunity for them to ask any clarifying questions that they had not had time to write down in an email. Additionally, this contact was the first step in building rapport with the participants so they understood that their participation was highly appreciated and valued (Seidman, 2013). Furthermore, this first official contact was when possible dates and meeting places were discussed.

**Data Collection**

Data collection in IPA should give participants the opportunity to share vivid, in-depth accounts of their first hand experiences of an event (Larkin et al., 2011; Smith, 2004). This type of data is best collected through open-ended interviews in a one to one setting where participants are afforded the opportunity to speak widely and freely and to share ideas, musings, and perceptions about an experience (Smith et al., 2009). Diaries, observations, and focus groups may be included in the data collection process, but little research has been published using these sources of data (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2004).
The interview approach allows the researcher to focus squarely on the participant. This “one to one” approach helps establish trust and a relationship between the parties, leading to a richer and deeper conversation as supporting and probing questions can be amended in the moment. While interviewing is the data collection method most often used in IPA research, researchers are not limited to it. Because the intent of IPA data collection is to understand the phenomenon from the position of those who experience it, any method that which allows such understanding is acceptable (Smith et al., 2009).

After receiving IRB approval, data for this qualitative IPA study was collected through open-ended interviews in a one to one setting. After the initial consent to participate in the interview had been obtained, and the short personal visit to the school to clarify any questions had been conducted, the researcher contacted each person to establish where he or she would like to carry out the interview. This first interaction between the researcher and the participant initiated the three-step interview process (Seidman, 2013).

All the interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location suggested by the participant where he or she felt safe and secure. This communication was carried out by phone, email, Skype or in person. Once the dates and location of the interviews had been agreed upon, an email was sent to confirm these appointments. This agreement upon time and place that was mutually favorable to the parties had the potential to remove power differentials and/or resentment between the participants and the interviewer (Seidman, 2013). Smith et al., (2009) spoke to the strength of this foundation of respect, as they believed without it there would be little chance of obtaining useful and informative data. All interviews were recorded on two devices to cover any technology failures. The primary source of recording was the recorder app
on an iPhone, and the backup recording was done using an iPad recorder app. All interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document (Creswell, 2014).

The first interview began with the exchange of the consent to participate form (see Appendix D) and an opportunity to further outline the research, and then moved into reflection on previous experiences with reading pedagogy and male students. This interview used open-ended questions. In this first interview, the goal was to build on the relationship between both parties and establish who these individuals were and what experiences they brought to the discussion. This discussion was grounded by the use of an interview guide, which helped set the agenda for the meeting (see Appendix E). This session was followed by an approximately 45 to 60 minute interview during which the details of the experience and context under examination were discussed (see Appendix F). A third interview provided an opportunity to share the transcripts of the previous meetings with the participant. However, the primary focus was to ask the participant to reflect on his or her experiences. This reflection is when the meaning making occurs: “the very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process” (Vygotsky, 1987, as quoted in Seidman, 2013, loc. 656).

**Data Storage**

To maintain confidentiality, participants chose a pseudonym under which all data collected from them was filed. The name corresponding to the alias was recorded in a document accessible only by the researcher and kept on a password-protected computer. An additional hard copy was maintained in a locked file in the researcher’s residence, only accessible to her. *(Research ethics guidebook, n.d.)*

All interviews were recorded in an audio file and transcribed. The transcription services had no contact with the participant and were only able to identify the file by the pseudonym.
The transcriptions obtained from the audio files were kept on a password-protected computer. These files were backed up on paper in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s residence. Audio files were destroyed once the coding and analysis process was completed. All consent forms with the participants’ true names were kept on paper in a locked file at the researcher’s residence, and a scanned copy of these documents were housed on a password-protected computer in the researcher’s home.

The greatest care was taken to remove any identification from the documents that would make their origin known to anyone other than the researcher (Research ethics guidebook, n.d.). To ensure this protection of all participants, the researcher made sure that all data was carefully labeled and dated so that there was no cross contamination of information between the research participants (Seidman, 2013).

Data Analysis

IPA has no single suggested way to work with the data collected. This freedom has resulted in researchers using a wide variety of analytic approaches (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2006). The priority in IPA analysis is the “attention towards our participants’ attempts to make sense of their meaning” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79).

The process of analysis is a fluid concept, but certain steps are recommended to ground the work on a solid base. The first step in this analysis process was reading and rereading the transcripts so that the researcher was fully aware of the nuances of that particular conversation. This time spent submerged in the data was beneficial during the second step, when initial note-taking occurred and points of interest or questions were noted on the transcript. This note-taking engaged and submerged the researcher in the data so that interpretation of ideas and themes
could begin to surface. Thus, the note taking yielded this first analysis and would be referenced later in the analytic process. (Smith et al., 2009).

The third and fourth steps revolved around developing and connecting themes in the data. The researcher sought to take vast amounts of data and reduce them to what was pertinent to the inquiry. After this had been achieved, the focus shifted to making connections. This process was repeated for each data set in turn, so that connections in themes could be recognized across cases (Smith et al., 2009).

This research analysis proceeded through several critical stages. A key element in each stage was writing analytic memos of ideas and thoughts as they struck the researcher (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). This recording of thoughts and ideas throughout the analysis process proved to be fundamental in connecting ideas and themes as the coding and analyzing phase unfolded. The first step in the process was an initial reading of the transcripts to gain a clear understanding of their content. The researcher listened to the audiotapes if context was not clear in the transcription. This initial submergence into the data created the bedrock for the next step of initial coding and additionally set the stage for the “participant becoming the focus of analysis” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82).

A second reading of the transcriptions occurred in a Word document with the review feature activated and on the MAXQDA website. During this second reading, ideas, thoughts, or specific words were highlighted using the review features in those programs and labeled with a combination of in vivo codes and process codes. The use of in vivo codes allowed the researcher to capture thoughts and ideas in the participant’s own words, which allowed her to identify repeated word use: patterns can emerge around the use of such phrases or words (Saldana, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). The process codes also allowed the researcher to capture the “the processes
of human action” (Saldana, 2014 p. 111), incorporating “actions intertwined with the dynamics of time, such as things that emerge, change, occur in particular sequences or become strategically implemented” (Miles et al., 2014 p. 75). Indeed, process codes are of value in all qualitative research, and are supportive of new researchers in the field (Miles et al., 2014).

During this process of careful line by line analysis, the researcher was very open-minded in the identification of ideas and concepts. This open mindset was important, as the intent in IPA research is to understand the ways in which the “participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). As this second phase unfolded, the researcher became very familiar with the nuances of the data. This familiarity allowed for a thorough understanding of what the interviewee was saying, explicitly or implicitly, through the close examination of the words used, the pauses taken, and phrases and/or words that were repeated (Smith et al., 2009).

As the researcher worked through this phase, she began to notice and record any repeated codes that were emerging from the data. This stage of initial coding, close reading, and analytic memo writing then set the researcher in a place to move on to stage three, when the emerging themes and patterns could be identified.

In the third stage, the researcher began to notice, identify, and categorize the themes that emerged from the data (Smith et al., 2009). These themes were captured by a phrase or sentence that summed up the essence of the data (Saldana, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). It is important to recognize that not all initially coded items made their way into the themed grouping. There was a clear path for identifying where the supporting evidence was located, so the researcher could substantiate the themes. The themes that emerged during this phase were next examined to discover patterns across conversations (Smith et al., 2009).
The last phase of the cycle of analysis was when the researcher sought to identify connections across the data. This process demanded that the researcher re-examine the emerging themes and consider how these ideas could be grouped within “super-ordinate” categories (Smith et al., 2009, p. 96). The goal of this process was to encapsulate the developing themes so that they merged into one that was more nuanced in how it captured the essence of the experiences that had been shared with the researcher. This phase of looking for super-ordinate themes common to all the participants was a critical period in the analysis. The identification of shared thinking and experiences then set the stage for placing these subordinate ideas into groupings. After completing the analysis phase, the researcher reflected on how these themes would fit within the framework of SDT, the guiding theory for this project.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the endeavor throughout each phase of the research in several ways. The researcher sought willing participants who would openly share their opinions. The researcher kept all records confidential. The participants were given the opportunity to check the accuracy of the transcripts. The researcher used careful analysis and selective quotations to highlight the themes that emerged (Smith et al., 2009). This analysis was thoughtfully presented so that the participants’ voices were not exploited. The researcher did not superimpose her thoughts onto the data collection process. The collection process stayed true to the methods outlined in this chapter so that the origin of all the information could be traced. Additionally, the researcher did not make false claims regarding the results of the research. This precise handling of data applied to both the findings and the transferability of the analysis. The researcher detailed the context of this research project, with all its quirks and anomalies, so others can interpret the findings as they see appropriate (Cresswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).
Furthermore, the researcher did not use her position to gain access to participants who were unwilling to be part of the project. All contacts with participants followed the IRB-approved procedures.

**Potential Researcher Bias**

The researcher’s passion and interest in this topic were rooted in several places. She was embedded within the community where the research was undertaken and is familiar with the challenges regarding reading engagement at the school. The researcher had worked at other schools that used a readers workshop methodology; however, she did not enter this research project with preconceived ideas about its outcome. The researcher acknowledges that she brought her positionality to this investigation. Those who read the findings will thus be able to recognize the purposeful effort to account for any potential bias (Norris, 1997).

**Conclusion**

The researcher acknowledged her positionality and remained open to new understandings during this research. This openness to new ideas mirrored the intent of the study, which was to comprehend teachers’ understandings and beliefs as they worked with young male readers in a fledgling readers workshop. An IPA approach allowed the researcher to analyze and interpret the experiences of these students. To use the words of Smith et al. (2009) “IPA’s core interest group is people concerned with the human predicament; this clearly takes us to focus on people engaging with the world” (p. 5). IPA allows the researcher to consider the words of the teachers, and thereby understand, through careful analysis and interpretation, the reading lives of these students. Gaining clarity on how young male readers are engaging with the world of books in school will help those who teach, support, and guide them.
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

This study sought to understand what teachers in a school where a purposeful shift to a readers workshop model of instruction occurred understood and believed about how this experience for young boys. The sub-question was: What are the experiences of teachers who teach male students through a readers workshop model? This information would provide insight into which pedagogical practices might have the best chances of reducing reading achievement discrepancies between the genders; such differences in reading proficiency occur across all socio-economic and cultural settings and have been a phenomenon documented for several decades.

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview format using the protocol found in Appendices E and F. This structure allowed participants, who were all teachers at the research site, to share their experiences in the classroom with male students during the shift in pedagogical practice. After analyzing the data, four superordinate and nine subordinate themes emerged. These themes spoke to the challenges of teaching authentic learning goals to connect with all the students regardless of gender, building the community needed to engage learners, the importance of understanding and appreciating how gender and culture influence engagement in school, and how as teachers themselves they had to be open to new and different perspectives on teaching and learning.

This chapter explains these superordinate and subordinate themes, beginning with an introduction to and analysis of the participants’ experiences, and the methodologies that they had used in their previous schools to teach reading, in order to create a vivid picture of how their past and more current experiences shaped their thinking around reading instruction. The researcher felt that it was important to understand something about the journeys of each of the participants
before they arrived at the school where this study took place, where they were working through new concepts and ideas in their reading pedagogical practice. The researcher believed their backgrounds undoubtedly shaped the lens through which they viewed their male students’ experience of reading instruction through the readers workshop model.

**Participant Profiles**

**Bella**

Bella had the most teaching experience of all of the participants, with 25 years spent as a classroom teacher and as an English language support teacher. For the 8 years prior to the interview, she had worked primarily as an English language support teacher; before that, Bella taught many pullout English language classes. While she was able to target students with interventions, that model, she explained, was not truly differentiated because the students were not included in the classroom and therefore were not exposed to the higher order thinking skill development that their peers were working through. As she sought to explain her earlier role as a support teacher, Bella said that “although I wasn't, in the true sense, teaching children to read, I was teaching them reading in English”. She currently works as a support teacher for homeroom teachers “primarily in literacy, reading and writing, supporting both their homeroom teacher on lesson planning and the students in their tasks in class”.

At the time of the interview, Bella had worked at the research site for 2 years. Her first year, she experienced the school’s lack of focus on literacy; during her second year, she was involved in the subsequent pilot project of the readers workshop model. Indeed she was one of the teachers who quickly moved into engaging the classroom teachers she worked with to embrace the workshop approach. Bella, in her role as an English language support teacher, had the opportunity to influence her colleagues with her enthusiasm for the approach because she
was able to co-teach and plan to help them see the effectiveness of the methodology. Bella said she thought she definitely had an advantage when it came to being open to new ideas, because she was always experiencing new ways of teaching. “I've also had a huge advantage of being in, I don't know, 35 to 40 teachers' rooms while they're teaching. I have picked up so many things, big and little,” she explained.

Because of the nature of her role in the school, which allowed her to work in many different classrooms, and because of her ability to create positive relationships with her peers, Bella was able to weigh in on the “buzz” that was being generated within the school around literacy during the shift in the focus of reading pedagogy:

I feel there's a big shift toward wanting to be literacy teachers, understanding more of the best practices. I think there's more and more teachers who are pushing themselves to go out of their comfort zone, from what they've always done. I think there are teachers who are having huge “aha” moments about not teaching the whole class.

As a teacher with many years of experience who had been involved in many initiatives during her time in the classroom, Bella was well positioned to share her thoughts on the changes she experienced. Actions or plans for change are often brought into schools, but the momentum for such shifts in thinking are not typically spurred on by the people actively engaged with the students and teachers. Because Bella was involved in many classrooms, her perspective that she was seeing changes in thinking and identifying a groundswell of interest in improving practice through the shift in instruction is valuable, and it can be appreciated that her enthusiasm for the approach was not a solitary endeavor.

Bella had previously worked in a public school system in a large urban city in the eastern part of the United States before moving to work in the international school setting. She was one
of two participants who had been employed in a different country, outside of the United States at an international school before joining the research site. While she had not used a readers workshop approach in the United States, the other international school where she had been employed for several years had used that method of instruction for reading. This background knowledge and experience had given Bella an understanding of the effect such an approach can have on student engagement. She was passionate in her enthusiasm for the readers workshop and elaborated how, even after so many years of teaching, she still felt a tingle of excitement when she taught using a workshop approach:

For me it's just so exciting. The results are so palpable. Even 25 years in, I come home from work and I think, "Oh my God. I get paid for this?" It's just so fun and exciting and interesting and I'm not bored yet. That's huge. That's huge. There are days, sure, but generally I think, I don't know, I think [back] to my early career, I tried so many things that I thought would be successful, and I was a huge teachers pay teachers person. Buying things over and over again. "This is going to be the one." They were okay but nor great. I have tried scads of grammar stuff, and vocabulary stuff. This was all I taught was literacy. Bar none, nothing I've used has been as successful as that workshop model. For both reading and writing. That's pretty exciting.

As Bella reflected on her early career, it is apparent that she, like other teachers, sought ways to engage students in authentic, meaningful learning. However, it is evident from her reflection that she felt that it was and is easy to fall into the trap of buying “gimmicks.” Instead, the work that she had undertaken-- participating in training and observing many teachers in their classrooms -- resulted in her being able to deliver and plan reading workshop lessons that reached all her students. Indeed, she pointed out that, because she had had the opportunity to
watch “real master teachers,” she had benefited from “seeing it for years and years and my own personal research and watching.”

Bella was one of the participants who was a parent, and she was the only one still facing the challenges of engaging a young son in elementary school with reading; this allowed her to share first-hand frustrations about reading and boys. She explained:

I think a lot of boys ... I don't know. Literacy comes slower and harder for the majority of them. I don't mean to say that they're behind. I just think somehow reading and writing just comes a little bit later. I can't put my finger on it. I don't know what it is exactly.

While sharing her observations around the struggles boys have with reading, Bella expressed that she felt the instruction in the classrooms under the new model had made a difference. “I think the kids really look forward to reading class now,” she said with a sense of pride in the payoff resulting from all the hard work undertaken to raise the profile of reading over the previous year.

Grace

Grace had completed 14 years of teaching, with 1 year spent as an international educator at the time she participated in this study. Grace had taught for 13 years in public school districts in the southern part of the United States as a classroom teacher. Grace had a wide variety of experiences while working in the United States. She had been employed at affluent suburban schools where the majority of the families had stay-at-home moms; she had also worked at Title I schools. Her experiences in schools at both ends of the socio-economic spectrum had shown her that the discrepancies in male achievement in reading were the same across many diverse situations. Indeed, Grace’s findings of the differences between the genders when it comes to reading engagement extend to the international sphere:

I always found it the same. I always found that it was just a mixture. My high ones love
to read. My low ones didn't. Again, even in small groups, though, I always notice that the girls seemed more interested. I would see the girls reenacting out some things that we were reading, and I didn't get that from boys, but it was the same in Title I schools and wealthy schools.

As Grace shared her stories of teaching reading in the classrooms, she emphasized how in other schools reading planning and instruction had been a solitary endeavor with little structure or support on how to engage students in reading. Indeed there had been no assigned time dedicated to reading:

Generally, it was kind of how we taught our own ideas in the classroom. We didn't have the readers workshop or reading block, which is what I studied a little bit in college.

Going into the classroom, we just had our own reading style. We had guided reading, and then our whole group reading that we did with basals, and then, basically, what we decided for our lessons, so there was no structure or program that we used.

Grace shared how what she had learned in college about teaching reading contrasted with what she had experienced within the schools where she had worked. This lack of structure and guidance in her other schools may have contributed to her willingness to try and work through the architecture of a reading workshop classroom, an endeavor that took commitment and open-mindedness because the structure and format of the lessons are less teacher-driven and more student-centered. This requires a release of control, which is not always readily adopted by teachers.

Grace was passionate about her teaching, and she explained how her previous experiences with reading instruction had been frustrating. Indeed, she had found that it was difficult to encourage her students, especially the boys, to engage with literacy. Discussing what
had frustrated her in the past, she divulged that she was open to new ways of thinking about
teaching and learning, and described the rewards in seeing students acquire an understanding of
a concept -- "the moment when you see that they get it, and just knowing that what I did, it
helped them learn something new, that's my motivation."

Possibly contributing to Grace’s motivation to adopt new practices was her prior experience when she had felt that much of the work of planning and preparing reading lessons had been a very solitary endeavor: “[Planning] was more of an individual basis. We didn't really plan together that much.” The lack of support, collegiality, or camaraderie in planning and preparing to teach ideas and concepts had characterized many of her previous work environments, and she expressed that teaching can become lonely work if educators are not purposeful in sharing successful ideas and strategies. It appears that the sense of teamwork and togetherness in the new setting contributed to Grace’s willingness and enthusiasm to try a different approach to instruction.

Grace had taught for 14 years, and it was evident she was eager to stay relevant and current in effective teaching practices. For example, her face lit up when she reflected on the possibilities available to teachers each and every day in the classroom. That magic kept her motivated: “[W]hen their little eyes light up, it's awesome. The moment when you see that they get it, and just knowing that what I did, it helped them learn something new, that's my motivation.” Grace said that she felt that as an educator she must never stagnate, which didn’t mean adopting every new fad that came along on the educational landscape. She said she simply felt that she needed always to be open to new ways of approaching learning:

Sometimes I think that I've taught for so long, and you gain so much information that you have to dispose of some of it, and as you do, you lose some of the things that you learned
because you've gained so much information. As I dispose of some old teachings, I've
gained new teachings, and I've gained teachings that are going with the times. I think
that's making me a better teacher because now ... I can't walk into a school in 2016 or '17
still teaching the way I did in 2001, 2002 and expect to be considered a good teacher.

Grace’s willingness to critically examine herself as a practitioner spoke to the passion and
professionalism that she brought to her role as a teacher. As a relatively new international
educator, she could have clung to the familiar in her approach to teaching and learning, but
instead, she opened herself up to other possibilities with all the angst and uncertainty that new
knowledge can create.

**Eva**

Eva had been a classroom teacher for 16 years at the time she participated in this research
project. She had spent 2 years working at the research site as a homeroom teacher. Before
moving to the international school setting, Eva taught in a public school system in the western
United States, in both affluent suburban schools and Title I institutions. Reflecting on her
teaching career, Eva shared how she had been required at one point to teach using basal readers
where the “kids read the same story and then we had the same book, the same spelling words.”
This approach was structured around bi-monthly testing which was aimed at verifying that all
students were moving forward. She said a shift in her teaching experiences occurred when a new
principal arrived at her school and encouraged the staff to get away from big publishing house
basal readers and to instead use chapter books for instruction. This change was supported
through Title I funding that allowed the school to purchase scores of highly engaging books on a
variety of topics. While Eva noted that the approach was not as strong as the readers workshop,
she found it far more engaging than the previous basal reader, a one book for all students method.

This experience of moving away from the one book for all mindset and seeing the excitement that choice had on the level of engagement of her students heightened Eva’s willingness to adopt the readers workshop approach at the research site. Discussing the change in instructional practice, Eva said, “The kids were really excited about the books.” She had experienced first-hand the power quality literature and choice in the classroom had on engagement.

Eva stated that she believed in being open minded to fresh ideas and concepts, especially in a new school setting:

I think my job as a teacher when you go to a new school, I think that's my job to actually do what the school has in place, not that I always agree with everything, but it's to do it with an open mind and do your best.

Eva’s experiences in schools within the United States where change had occurred successfully around reading pedagogy likely shaped her willingness and desire to work towards a shared goal in reading instruction at the research site. As Eva described how she had worked through the process of changing her teaching, it became apparent that she was an individual who was open to working in partnership with others. She was willing to share her mistakes and take feedback so that she could grow as a teacher. She explained:

[T]he reading I hadn't really taught specifically that way. I think just working with another adult and she would teach, I would teach, we'd do it together sometimes. She'd give me feedback when I did stuff. I'd ask her questions about her stuff.
Eva’s ability to question what was happening in school indicated that she thought deeply about her practice as a teacher. Furthermore, her willingness to share her teaching space and co-teach emphasized her adaptability and readiness to share ideas and concepts around best practices in the classroom: “I find it to be my job to get the kids excited.”

Eva was a mother whose children had completed school and were either working in their respective careers or still attending university. It was evident through her reflections that their experiences in school had made her consider her own practice in the classroom. In a discussion of the power of reading books in class, Eva was very passionate in asserting that such practices were of immense value to students. She pointed out that hearing rich language through oral reading with no other goal in mind than pure enjoyment is a powerful tool for engaging students in the world of books. She explained: “That's basically how I got my son to read and really love it” -- by sharing rich stories aloud and enticing him to read. While Eva may not have consciously acknowledged her journey as a mother when she entered her class each day, it became apparent that it underscores her decision-making. As a parent of boy and a girl, Eva witnessed first-hand the frustrations and pitfalls of young students of both genders as they juggle school work and reading for pleasure. Eva’s multiple roles as a a mother, an educator, and a student all shaped her daily approach to teaching and learning.

**Victor**

Victor had been teaching for 8 years at the time he participated in this research project. He had completed 3 years service at the research school and 2 years at another international school located in the Middle East. Before moving overseas, Victor had worked in Canada for 2 years at various schools. When the researcher interviewed him, Victor was a young father of two pre-school children and was simultaneously completing a masters degree in education. His prior
teaching experiences in reading had been a rather hit and miss affair. He had worked with basal readers at previous establishments and felt that the teaching that had occurred there had been uncoordinated: “[T]here was nothing really concrete set in regards to an actual program. We didn't even really have any guided reading books. It was much less structured.”

It is likely that this experience with uncoordinated and sporadic reading instructional practices spurred Victor to more readily embrace an approach to reading at the international school that would support and guide him to create lessons and learning opportunities for his students. His frustrations with previous experiences became evident as he talked about the lack of books available and about students not focusing on comprehension and the enjoyment of reading, but rather on locating and reading the hardest books they could find:

A lot of them have been taught, up until that point in time in third grade, so long as they were able to read hard books, they would be successful. However, when it came to actually explaining comprehension, or explaining greater levels of thinking, they were much more apprehensive to do so.

Victor was passionate when he talked about teaching and learning and his enjoyment of his time spent in the classroom: “What motivates me ... Okay. I would say simply the possibility to develop other aspects of a child's learning.” As the study participant with the most time spent at the research site, Victor was able to share insights on what had occurred in the early years within the classrooms. He explained that “until this year, at least at a third grade level, I never taught under an actual ... a proper structured reading program.” While readers workshop is not a reading program in a traditional sense like a basal reader approach, which is set for a specific grade level and offers teachers’ guides, it does provide a scaffolding around which teachers can build their lessons. It was evident that structured plans were significant for Victor. He stated:
When I first got to XXX as you well know, we had nothing - I can't even remember what we would have used. Did we even have any books? Yeah, we didn't have any leveled reading books. The next year we kind of had them, but there was no structured program.

As Victor continued his narrative about reading instruction, it became apparent that the high value he placed on the structured components of the readers workshop was based on the need to have a common understanding of reading pedagogy. He expressed that, if colleagues at the research site were not willing to open the doors of their classrooms to new ideas, then what would ensue would be a continuation of pockets of people not aligning their teaching practice to the philosophy of the school. Such an occurrence, he indicated, would result in a disjointed and disconnected philosophy and an approach to reading similar to the negative experience Victor had previously known. Victor expressed that he believed that, as an educator, he had an obligation to investigate and work on initiatives that, while they might require considerable effort on his part, would benefit his students. It was apparent that, as a young father of two and an individual working on a masters degree in addition to his work in the classroom, Victor truly attempted to put his convictions into practice.

**Jovi**

Jovi was beginning her third year of teaching at the research site as a classroom teacher at the time of the study. Before moving to the Middle East, she had taught in the southern part of the United States for 3 years. Despite having less time in the classroom than other participants, Jovi exhibited the characteristics of being an active learner, holding a masters degree in education and progressing to work on a doctorate in educational leadership.

Jovi described her journey at schools where she worked prior to coming to the international setting; she outlined their approach to reading which had consisted primarily in
basal readers. She explained that her last school had used a “pre-made reading curriculum” that did not require teachers to actively develop most of their lessons by themselves. Jovi said that teachers given guides and additional supplemental books, which they followed “page to page.” As Jovi reflected on this program, she indicated that she felt that, for struggling readers, the program was helpful; it did not, however, encourage students who were meeting or exceeding the standards

…because with the struggling readers, they needed more foundation. They needed more reading strategies, they needed more direct instruction. Whereas the readers who were exceeding expectations, they needed higher level reading. They needed more abstract thinking questions or higher order thinking questions. It really wasn't pushing them to that next level, so they'd remain stagnant.

As Jovi shared her story, it was evident that she was someone who had arrived in classrooms with a “pretty solid foundation at the university level” for supporting learning through reading. She explained that this knowledge base gave her data from which to identify that the basal reader program was not engaging her more advanced students. Her understanding of the discrepancies in engagement led her to comprehend that what would work for the higher achieving students surely would not work for all. To emphasize this, she said that as a teacher she “can't always do the same thing every year or else it would be ... You'd just be stagnant.” Her passion for improving her skills was evident when she explained that she could have chosen to go down the road of the familiar in her teaching, but she sought ways to improve her students’ learning by challenging herself to learn new skills alongside the students and co-teachers. Even though she had fewer years of experience than her peers, she was clearly committed to grow as an educator to fully support her students.
Contemplating her teaching, Jovi shared that she felt that, as an educator, she needed to remain open minded regarding teaching practices. She intensely stated her convictions about the need to use innovative methods to help students:

I think that when you use innovative strategies, in essence you are differentiating. When you're differentiating, you're making sure that you're meeting students on their level and you're ensuring that you're reaching students in a way that they can all learn.

She elaborated on her responsibility to put effort into understanding new ideas in teaching:

I definitely have to kind of like, kind of bone up on it, do a little bit more research, and read some more about it. I feel like I have the ability to get the information, understand it, and then deliver it in a way that other people will understand it, as well.

Jovi was a passionate teacher who was willing to do what it takes to make her students move forward in their learning. She was very reflective about her journey with the readers workshop. Jovi shared her enthusiasm about having learned a new style of teaching in reading, expressed that she would be able to build upon this the following year, and was animated about being able to support new teachers moving into new grade levels. This willingness to support new teachers is a critical issue in international schools because of high staff turnover and mobility within the school. Jovi, evidenced by her work towards a doctorate in education, exhibited that she was an individual who wanted to move upward into a more decision-making role within her institution. Her openness to engaging with shifts in pedagogy within the research site was clear.
Participant Experience

The participants’ prior teaching experience ranged from 25 to 8 years. All participants were educated in North America and had experience working in both high poverty areas and more affluent schools. Additionally, two of the participants had been employed in other international schools outside of North America, while the rest had worked in highly diverse settings and as such were used to differing perspectives on literacy in relation to cultural values. All participants had completed at least one year of service at the research site.

All participants had worked in school districts or private schools where basal readers were followed, page by page. These books were a one stop for all reading needs, with teacher guides setting the focus of each and every lesson. Others had experienced mandated bi-monthly testing on all students, the results of which had been used to target particular children on specific standards that they were not meeting. In Eva’s words, “so every two months, we would have a reading test. We had to document everything we were doing. Then we knew which standards we were supposed to be teaching in those two months”. These students were then re-taught the same lessons while their peers moved on to new concepts; the students that lagged behind were then re-tested to ensure skill acquisition. Some of the participants had experienced reading instruction where they were expected to use the basal readers but had found that they did not have sufficient supplies for all the students. Victor said:

At third grade at my previous school we used Mondo, which is a series of guided reading books. It's a series of leveled readers, is what it is. For third grade, however, we didn't have the resources, unfortunately, and we used ... It was kind of more catch-as-catch-can with third grade at my previous school.
For most of the participants, planning for reading instruction had been a solitary adventure with little or no collaboration on ideas and concepts on how to engage students. Some participants had used “backward planning” to make sure all students hit the targeted standards with no differentiation on where each child was in his or her literacy journey:

It was more of an individual basis. We didn't really plan together that much. It was more we had our grade-level team meetings about the things that we needed to do to make sure we were teaching the concepts, but we did not plan how to teach the concepts.

All except one participant -- who had experienced a new principal at a school in North America, who procured new resources to obtain highly engaging texts -- shared how they had not had access to books that would engage and capture the interest of both genders. Indeed, Victor shared how in one school where he had previously worked, decoding complex texts was a skill valued more than evidence of comprehension, enjoyment, or engagement.

A lot of them have been taught, up until that point in time in third grade, so long as they were able to read hard books, they would be successful. However, when it came to actually explaining comprehension, or explaining greater levels of thinking, they were much more apprehensive to do so.

In contrast, Bella, who had worked in international schools for several years, shared how she had seen first-hand the impact of the readers workshop in engaging male readers through choice and through building intrinsic motivation: “I think that they appreciated, it was a readers workshop model. After the mini lesson, of course, is the individual conferencing. They responded very positively to the one-on-one time with a teacher.”
Two of the participants were mothers of boys. Both described the challenges their sons faced when they attempted to engage with reading. Eva had a son in college and reflected on how she had worked diligently to entice her son to read:

I think of my two kids. My daughter just learned to read and it was really easy and my son, he wanted to play outside. He wanted to do mud. He wanted to play with Pokemon. The interest was just not there. I read to him for years until he had interest

All of these combined experiences and journeys that the participants took to arrive at the research site created within them fertile ground for new learning. They had all experienced highs and lows teaching reading in their previous positions. However, the highs were not enough to convince them that previous methods of instruction were the ones that they should hold onto. Perhaps if these individuals had stayed in their home states where everyone was teaching the same way, they may not have sought alternate ways to approach reading. But the catalyst of being together at the research site enabled them to change their practices and thinking around reading. This diverse group of individuals thus provided the rich data for this study that led to the identification of the following superordinate and subordinate themes.

**Themes**

**Effects of Shifting Pedagogy**

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.

- Benjamin Franklin

The recognition by the participants that they had changed as they engaged in teaching through the readers workshop model was a key element acknowledged by all. These teachers had all worked in places where they felt that they had not engaged all pupils effectively and that the students, in particular the boys in their care, had been in some form uninspired by their
teaching methods. Ultimately three subordinate themes emerged under the concept of *Effects of shifting pedagogy*, *Rethinking practice*, *Readers workshop impact on learning*, and *Raising accountability of students*.

**Rethinking practice.** Participants concurred that throughout the 2015-2016 school year when they transitioned to a readers workshop model they had listened and responded to student voices more than ever before. Grace said:

I think, number one, ask them what interests them, and make that important to the class. A lot of the students, they love to read soccer books, they love to read any kind of sports book. They did love to read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, so I would put those out and talk about, "Oh, that's a really cool book to read. Even have a book of the week that we think that they should read, or they might be interested in and share with each other.

This recognition that tapping into the students’ passion and channeling it into developing their reading skills through choice of text was highly effective and was a fundamental idea that emerged. All the participants reiterated this sentiment as they reflected on their past teaching practices, specifically with young boys in mind. Their commentaries repeatedly highlighted that, under the basal reader method they had previously employed, stories were mandated by the school and followed page by page, which obviously did not take into consideration students’ personal interests or passions. That practice further alienated reluctant readers, because, as Jovi pointed out, the need to have engaging text is key if students are to participate in their learning, “ensuring again, going back to the whole selection, that these are titles that the boys would be interested in, in the first place.” The freedom the participants enjoyed because they were at a school where they did not fear that their job security was based on student outcomes on tests and bi-monthly standardized testing may have additionally influenced their willingness to give more
voice to the students. The research site most definitely encouraged inquiry-based learning that supports the voices of students; however, making space for these voices to be heard required a commitment to letting go of some control.

Grace reflected on how her teaching had changed though the power of utilizing interactive read aloud techniques, a sentiment other participants echoed:

[W]e were able to really read out loud to students and incorporate a lot of that comprehension aspect in those read alouds, you know, stopping and talking to the kids about what we're reading and making it proactive.

It appeared that many of the teachers had perceived read out loud as just that, a story read to students for enjoyment. So when they were shown the power of the interactive read aloud, they adopted it whole-heartedly. Grace suggested that this shift in teaching was beneficial to the students:

I felt like they were much more engaged. They loved the read alouds, and I think because we did make it more interactive, they were very focused… When we did stop and ask questions, they were very willing to attempt to answer; some of them even went back to, "Oh, when we read that, do you remember this?"

This engagement and willingness to be involved in the lesson though interactive techniques is important to consider when working with reluctant students. When students are feeling alienated or not part of the learning group, they are less likely to be willing to explore new ideas. By a simple shift in thinking about how books were being read in the classroom, Grace was able to recognize the difference in her students. An interactive read aloud requires teachers to make their thinking very visible for the students, to a certain degree. Grace, by enthusiastically adopting this method, became willing to share with her students that she too was
a learner and had to think deeply, and that answers to questions did not necessarily come automatically to her just because she was an adult. An additional layer that motivated students to be involved in their learning, while not stated explicitly by the participants, may have been that they began to feel proud as they recognized that their contributions to the class were acknowledged and valued; powerful but simple strategies that aimed to involve all students in the lesson, which ultimately built individuals’ motivation to become active learners, proved highly effective.

Participants all voiced a shared sentiment about the positive impact their shift in practice had on all their students, particularly boys, and about how much more engaged the students were when the teachers themselves actively participated in the learning. Victor described how, when he made a purposeful choice to model the concepts being taught in his reading lessons, he found that the students -- especially the boys -- were more apt to try and emulate his actions:

[When you as a teacher read to the kids, it shows that you have enthusiasm for reading, and then it develops their enthusiasm towards reading. It shows that you enthusiasm for a certain aspect of reading, and then it develops their enthusiasm for that aspect towards reading.

As a male teacher, it could be argued that Victor might have had more of a connection with his male students than his female colleagues did. However, other participants corroborated his impression that, when they too had the opportunity to share specific skills through modeling and reading rich literature, their students exhibited their increased buy-in for reading; students’ enthusiasm rose when they saw the teachers modeling their own learning processes and other students interacting, which sent the message that all the members of the class were able learners. This sense that everyone in the class was working together empowered even the most reluctant
reader to join in the learning process; As Bella described, “the results are so palpable.”

The participants frequently expressed that conferencing – or providing students with consistent, individual feedback – also had a positive effect on the learning environment. Eva noted that this approach was beneficial for all, but that it was particularly effective with male students:

the kids are motivated to read from the feedback they get from you that intrinsically motivates them themselves. Is that correct? They get motivated from your conferencing basically, your feedback.

The power of the conferences lay in the teachers giving each student differentiated feedback to guide him or her on an level through a book of his or her choice. This individualized feedback eliminated the one stop shop for all approach to teaching that characterized the basal method; each student, as Eva reflected, recognized that she was giving him or her attainable and personalized goals to work towards. Eva’s status as a mother of two might have enhanced her ability to connect with students during those one-on-one sessions; however, participants who were not parents also validated the power of the individual conference. Bella elaborated on the organic differentiation that occurred during these meetings between the teacher and student as she reflected on the architecture of the readers workshop. She insisted, however, that conferencing needed to be in-depth and not just a superficial "pat on the back." Rather, Bella said, it should be:

not conferencing like, "Do you like what you're reading?" It has to be a little deeper. I would fully admit, that's a huge, tall order to keep track of everyone's reading level, how they're progressing.
It is important to note that conferencing is a key part of the guidance, instruction, and assessment of a student. In the younger grades, early or emergent readers may need help with decoding strategies and how to self-monitor their own reading for understanding; they commonly also require guidance on how to choose books. Older students who have moved into a more independent phase of their reading may need more support with checking for comprehension as they try out different genres. This is particularly important for readers who tend to reread non-threatening familiar texts, to encourage them to venture out into unfamiliar territory of new titles and authors.

While it is clear that differentiated conferencing is challenging not only from a time management perspective when classroom teachers have 20 or more students in their care, but also from an organizational one as teachers must maintain a clear record of conversations and goals set with each student. Despite these hurdles, both Bella and Eva spoke to the power of the quiet words spoken to each child during that individual time; the sessions worked to break down rigid standards and benchmarks to put in place attainable goals for even the most reluctant students.

The participants expressed that as teachers they felt they needed to acknowledge their part in the process of bringing young boys into the world of literacy. They asserted that they had to be mindful of their practice because it was only through the thoughtful process of considering the boys in their care that they would be able to see the differences their methodologies had on their students. The interviews with the participants revealed that the teachers were not implying that they were focusing solely on the male students; they began to understand instead that transforming their practices to engage the most reluctant readers enable learning for all students, regardless of gender.
**Readers workshop impact on learning.** Teachers are always searching for ways to make the learning experiences of students meaningful. One thread that consistently emerged from the data in this study was affirmations of how using the readers workshop approach affected student learning in positive and meaningful ways. Victor, for example, expressed passionately his belief that the structure of the readers workshop facilitated a learning situation where students and teachers could more readily identify reasonable goals. He compared a more traditional environment of guided reading to readers workshop. In the former, he asserted, students typically read the same book and conduct “round robin” style reading sessions with their teacher; the readers workshop, he said, allowed for a much more in-depth analysis of texts by the students:

Readers workshop gives us structured objectives to work towards. Oftentimes, I find guided reading ends up being what could be called as basal reading with a basic analysis of students' comprehension….Readers Workshop focuses more in depth on ... whether it's inferencing, whether it's reflection, whether it's literal comprehension, and it hones in on separate skills that the students can work upon.

Victor was alluding to the reading continuums and rubrics available for teachers within readers workshop that can be used to monitor student progression and help them set goals as they move forward. This ability for the student to self-reflect is especially important in schools that adhere to an inquiry-based curriculum, such as those that fall under the PYP program. Furthermore, these continuums and rubrics have been created to assist teachers, students, and parents regardless of whether they use the common core, American Education Reaches Out (AERO), or other systems of standards and benchmarks to assess and monitor students’ progress.
An essential element that Victor captured along with to differentiation is the understanding of what “guided reading” actually looks like in practice. Guided reading can be misconstrued as a readers workshop approach when the latter is not fully understood. The cards that often accompany a guided reading book set with prepared questions are teacher centered and not driven by the questions and responses that arise from conversations with the students. As Victor developed his skills in the readers workshop, he understood more deeply the very different perspectives included in guided reading and the readers workshop, and the power and limitations of each to create meaningful lessons.

Bella’s reflections regarding the impact of readers workshop on learning are particularly important because, not only was she the participant with the most teaching experience, but also because she was the only member of the team who had used the readers workshop structure at other schools. While the research site was Bella’s first assignment in the Middle East, she had worked with students from a wide range of backgrounds in her other postings. Incorporating this vast experience, she explained: n I think right from the start, it empowered students to know how to pick books at their level. Then the reading experience is easier, because it's the right level and they want to read more.” She further developed this thought by saying that “nothing I've used has been successful as that workshop model. For both reading and writing. That's pretty exciting.”. She noted the power of the design of the readers workshop for student learning, stating that the conferencing and strategy groups had the strongest impact because, through them, students build a very trusting and close relationship with the teacher to discuss their reading needs. This process facilitates highly effective, differentiated learning situations for all students. She emphasized the comprehensive nature of the approach, which extended beyond direct and rote instruction to create a classroom culture of literacy:
I think partly, the readers workshop not only is the methodology so good, part of it is creating a culture of literacy in the classroom so that the kids will say, "Oh it's reading time. Yes"… it's creating that passionate love of literacy. That's infectious. I think especially for Grades 1 to 3.

The culture of literacy that Bella identifies is especially valuable in the highly multicultural setting of the research site. The classrooms, which contain students from many cultural backgrounds, can establish a shared culture around literacy. This shared love of reading, regardless of the language in which it occurs, potentially has the power to create bridges between students who are struggling to settle into a new school, country, and culture. This relationship building is especially important for students who are constantly moving around the world as a result of their parents’ work assignments. Such relationships allow them a safe space for building connections through a common respect for reading.

As the participants discussed the impact of readers workshop on their students, the structure of the lessons emerged as a powerful theme. The teachers concurred that, when they kept their talking time down to a maximum of 8-10 minutes with purposeful time planned out for active engagement, students engaged more actively. Victor commented on the continued effect that this methodology had on his students through even the final weeks of the school year. This time of the year is especially challenging in a region like the Middle East, where, at year-end, the school day is reduced in half to respect the religious practices of Ramadan, when students and their families observe fasting. As Victor observed:

[T]here were even times when even towards the end of the year…often during silent reading when kids are supposed to be antsy and I would give them free reading time, they
would still be upset when I said, "Okay, time's up." No, I would totally say that a lot of my male students were much more enthused about reading.

Victor’s thoughts on student engagement are particularly instructive because he had extensive experience working in the Middle East and fully understood the challenges that arise when a combination of shortened school days and pending angst for summer vacation are mixed into the learning environment. Thus, methodologically and theoretically, it must be noted that the readers workshop approach was extremely effective in engaging resistant students with reading, despite these powerful, culturally embedded and structural challenges.

**Raising accountability of students.** A theme that emerged quite quickly was the sense that the teachers were moving the students from being passive recipients of information to being active participants in their learning. To achieve this, several of the teachers spoke about how the structure of the readers workshop gave students both freedom and responsibility. Eva addressed this when she described how her students were held accountable for their learning during her reading lesson:

they get to pick what they want and that the main thing they're doing during reading is reading and that the stuff that I'm presenting is short and it just guides them. To me, it takes the responsibility off me and puts it on them. Now, that being said, when I do my guided reading groups, then it's like we're in it together. They have their independent times to really develop as a reader on their own. I think that that gives them power and control, and kids like that.

Eva was not suggesting that she had no responsibility, but rather that students had to take ownership of listening and trying out new concepts introduced in the mini-lesson. Students were given freedoms, but also responsibility. Educators in the 21st century are charged with guiding
students to develop trans-disciplinary skills, not just increase their content knowledge. Eva expressed that she was creating the venue for students to develop transferable skills of responsibility and accountability for their actions. This idea of choice and accountability for the students, both to themselves and in response to expectations they set with their teacher, is a key strength of the readers workshop approach because it gives students time to develop these skills while enjoying books they value.

Jovi also emphasized this concept of self responsibility when she explained that the reading groups Eva had pointed out as being of great benefit to learning were especially important for young male students:

I think the small group interactions were important…with the struggling readers. At the end of the day at this age, they still want more of your attention. I think the younger males or males who are struggling, it's kind of like "I really don't care as much about reading as girls anyway." It's not really a concern. I think having pulled them into that small group, kind of forces them to address the issue. It helps to build their confidence in their ability in reading.

Jovi, unwittingly perhaps, was helping her reluctant male readers explore a venue for self-reflection. Providing them a safe place to examine their reading ability engaged them in a practice of self-accountability. This accountability was thus not teacher driven, but became something that the students identify themselves; it is linked to the effectiveness of the workshop model which sets up spaces for small group learning and interactions that move beyond skill and drill activities.
Along with the increased accountability students develop to be on task and responsible for being engaged, as Victor noted, “the boys are certainly enthusiastic in regards to [reading].” He thought this enthusiasm was due to:

- a type of motivation for self-improvement, certainly, because they acknowledge what level they're at, and then they [boys] want to - It's not even a matter of "I want to be the best in the class," they just want to improve from there.

Victor was suggesting that this model of instruction allowed children to build their intrinsic motivation to read; this motivation arose from them knowing exactly where they were in their reading journeys and in establishing clear, differentiated, and agreed upon goals. However, this type of enthusiasm is not something that is necessarily going to occur within a classroom naturally. Teachers and students must take purposeful steps to co-create a class culture that is open and accepting of everyone’s journey to literacy.

Bella reflected on the essence of the increased accountability students acquired through the readers workshop, stating:

- I think that the conferencing kept them on task. There was nowhere for them to go or look around. They had to discuss what they were reading with me. It became pretty apparent quickly to both of us that they hadn't been reading.

This answerability to not only the teacher but also to themselves was something that the students needed to build as they became familiar with the change in the structure of their reading lessons. Multiple approaches to creating accountability within a readers workshop structure exist, from reading blogs for the older grades to share what they have read, to such strategies as simple as partnering with another student to talk about books, to book shares. However, all of the participants in this study spoke to the power of the small group and individual conferencing; it
became apparent in the analysis of the interviews that this one on one time with the teacher truly cemented the building blocks that motivated the students. This motivation ultimately helped the students develop the capacity to stay on task with their reading lessons over the course of the school year.

**Constructing a Learning Community**

No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.

- James Comer, *Leave no child behind*

Participants all identified the need to create a learning community within their classrooms. They all acknowledged that each student brings different interests and passions which add to the knowledge base of the group, as they recommend and suggest reading material for each other. As teachers examined how this learning community could be created, three subordinate themes emerged: *Genres and engaging high interest books*, *Authenticity of learning*, and *Rewarding students*.

**Genres and engaging high interest books.** All of the participants spoke to the power of providing books that engaged students and reflected their interests. They expressed that, without such material, the divide between those who were already involved in the reading process and those who were hovering on the edge of engagement would widen a gap that could limit the sense of community within the group because the subliminal message delivered would be that “what you are interested in does not count.”

Jovi highlighted the importance of having a wide variety of text in her classroom and the power of giving choice to students to increase engagement:

If we were teaching making predictions, and I allowed them to select a book of their interest that they could use to manipulate the concept of prediction, then they're going to
be more interested. I feel that they would gain a deeper understanding of prediction, because they're interested in what they're reading. I firmly believe that when you force something down a student's throat ... If you can't get them to actually read a story, how are you going to get them to tease out the skills and objectives, and better understand it if in the first place they won't even read the text?

Jovi extended her rationale about choice:

I think a big part of reading instruction, especially with struggling readers, is that you present them with material that they're interested, and intrigued in. You kind of like trick them into the learning aspect of reading. You know, when you're struggling with something, you don't necessarily want to do it. You go to this level of discomfort and you learn through discomfort. As a child, you don't understand that it takes the uncomfortable to grow and to get better. If you can decrease that level of discomfort, I think you're more apt to help them to increase their skills in reading.

Jovi captured an important point when she suggested that if students are interested in a book, the stress of reading decreases, particularly if they are struggling or reluctant readers. Some might assert that offering choice over reading material merely indulges students’ passions and does not expose them to other concepts. However, allowing students to work with a text that has an intrinsic value to them actually helps them apply the concepts and skills being taught.

Both Jovi and Grace discussed how a similar unit of writing instruction increased enthusiasm for reading in their class because it generated a discussion on genre. While Jovi and Grace did not explicitly tell the students how genderized books could affect the appeal of a genre for different groups of students, it definitely opened a conversation about the power of finding the right text. This debate in Grace’s class had been initiated by questions stemming from
understanding perspective in storytelling, which had resulted in students looking at stories and explaining why certain books were more appealing than others:

One of the things we asked about was, "Why do you think some children don't like to write fairy tales?" One of the boys said, "Well, because they're mostly written for girls. The characters are all from the girl's point of view." Then we kind of carried that into books, as well, and they're like, "Well, yeah. When you read a fairy tale, it's a girls' story." I think when we brought that out, they kind of realized, "OOh, yeah, that is why we don't like reading fairy tales." Then I actually had boys bringing in fairy tales and reading fairy tales, but they would read fairy tales that seemed to them more masculine.

The discussion that ensued around perspective allowed the students in the class to gain some understanding that fairy tales or any genre of story can be skewed towards either gender, but within every genre there is room to find books that appeal to everyone. Locating and identifying which types of stories and texts resonate with a person is a major consideration within a readers workshop architecture. Participants reiterated the importance of this idea as they spoke to the power of students’ choice over the reading material they chose. The students’ job is to find the stories that resonate with them and then engage with that text. The teacher's role is to guide the students’ search for appealing writing and then use those books during lessons. As after all, teaching objectives can be achieved through many different types of books. As they release book choice to their students, educators must be aware that not everyone needs to read the same text to learn a concept.

When the participants considered the texts available at the research site, they acknowledged the effect of variety in the classroom libraries on student engagement. Victor, who had the longest tenure at the school, had seen a great increase in the variety of available
books; he noted the impact this had on students:

I do definitely think though that the selection of books that we had this year played a heavy role in regards to the enthusiasm in regards to reading, because prior to this, it was really just catch-as-catch-can and luck of the draw in regards to what the students were going to be reading during reading sessions.

While Victor did not state that there was an increase in test scores or attainment, he did highlight student enthusiasm as the very thing that can build their intrinsic motivation to challenge themselves to keep reading. Struggling readers can only begin to make the necessary gains in their skills by increasing the amount they read. Jovi summed this sentiment up by suggesting, “If you have a reader who's already struggling, and they're not interested in the genre, then you're not really going to reach them.” Choice matters in engaging students; only by being purposeful with a broad range of text that does not exclude or prioritize any group can reluctant readers be involved.

The overwhelming message from the participants was that having books in the classroom that were of value to the students leveraged their enthusiasm for reading. Of course it takes support from the school to invest in such texts, which is not always possible when funds for such purchases are not available. This challenges schools that run on a more limited budget. The research site had the financial resources to make these purchases, and the educators in the classrooms were prepared to acknowledge the power of choice and relinquish more control to their students.

**Authenticity of learning.** As all the participants considered what made a difference in reaching their young boys, a shared idea kept emerging: through a readers workshop model, the students could see that the learning was urgent and real. Bella reflected on the lack of
authenticity in some of the instruction she had witnessed at the research site in her comments about the use of “centers,” which are often used for moving children around a classroom to different learning stations and appear in elementary classrooms:

What I had seen and I think this is pretty common, is centers, which I believed in. I did. I thought like, "Oh it's great. They're moving around." I used those for years and I thought my first year at this school especially. It made me think like, "Gosh, I forgot about this."

One center was closed reading and maybe spelling. On the surface it looks good. I swear to God it does, but if you scratch the surface, what the kids are doing at each center is not that great. Especially the center that they're not at with an adult is pretty lost time. I think it's because they know it's not so real. I think it has to be really authentic for a purpose. Nobody's interested, I don't care if you're 6 or 60, if you think it's not real or important what you're doing, you're not going to engage. You will if you want to be an A student, you'll march through the paces, but those boys who don't think it's real, forget it.

They're going to go, "Great, I'm at the center without the teacher. I'm going to pinch my friend and giggle."

This concept of making the learning authentic and real to students must start early. Motivation can be developed by honoring the work the students are doing and sharing with them real life applications for their efforts. Bella now appreciated that center work was in essence busy work – an activity that appeared to be challenging students but in reality was just a management system for the teacher.

Bella added to her thoughts about authenticity of learning when she discussed the implications of student choice over the literature they are reading.
I think the empowering of young male students to picking out a book they might like, is a huge hurdle. I think that readers workshop leads them to know how to do that …Then the reading experience is easier, because it's the right level and they want to read more.

Providing students with the power to make choices over the genres of books they are reading allows personal idiosyncrasies and interests to be tapped into, which motivates them to learn more. By reading books of their own choosing, they are reading something they enjoy while also applying the skills being shared with them by their instructor. Jovi spoke to this idea when she said that:

If we're teaching, making predictions and I allowed them to select a book of their interest, that they could use to manipulate the concept of prediction they're going to be more interested, I feel that they would gain a deeper understanding of prediction, because they're interested in what they're reading.

When the content of the reading of value to the students, their motivation to read is increased because they have an interest in inquiring into the material they have chosen. This concept of choice means that the text is not being imposed upon the student; rather, he or she is holding one that already grips the imagination.

Grace, summarizing how the readers workshop creates an authentic learning situation for her students, pointed out, “It's how we introduce reading to them, and how we introduce the concepts. It was very natural. This sense of learning being natural and not forced upon the students through a one stop shop teacher guide for all students echoed through the commentary of Grace’s colleagues. The learning was real, had purpose, and as such created a “buy-in” with the students.
Thus it can be appreciated that the difference between authentic learning and learning to achieve an “A” are very different ideas. If, as Bella suggested, educators want students to move through the motions to complete an assignment with no takeaway understanding of the concepts taught, then centers are the way to go. However, if teachers actually wish to guide students to build within themselves the ability to see the transferability of the skills and concepts they are learning, and thus create intrinsic motivation, students must be exposed to learning that they believe has real world value and authenticity.

**Rewarding students.** Jovi reflected that what she did as a teacher had more impact than physical rewards. She pointed out that stickers and stars were not going to have any long-term impact on her students, but the “feedback to them is what motivates them. By that, you're building their intrinsic motivation.” Victor echoed Jovi’s sentiments as he felt that the only ones who were going to gain from rewards were the students who were already engaged with the learning. This type of incentive created further divides within the classroom, and thus can be self-defeating:

> In regards to rewarding kids for reading books, okay, I could. But in the end, what I think is going to happen is for something like that, you're going to get a dynamite kid that reads constantly, and then you're going to get somebody like XXXX who's just ... He's just not academically gifted, and it's just going to make him feel like crap even more so.

Eva was very clear about how she felt about handing out stickers for the work the students were completing: “No.” Eva felt that her students were motivated to read by the feedback she gave. This could be perceived as a reward, but was instead something that built personal motivation to engage with the reading. “The kids are motivated to read from the
feedback they get from you that intrinsically motivates them themselves. Is that correct? They get motivated from your conferencing basically, your feedback?”

The clear idea that emerged was that stickers and other types of extrinsic rewards were only going to reach certain students. Teachers who are purposeful in their conferencing with students by giving clear feedback and setting goals with the students will be giving rewards in a form accessible to all. This accessibility is created through the conversation they have engaged in with the student, which allows the child to build his or her own motivation to meet the goals established. This individualized attention to each child allows for natural differentiation of reading instruction within a readers workshop framework. While the teachers acknowledged that they must be organized by keeping detailed notes and records as they move through their students’ conferencing, there was a definite sense of pride that emanated from Eva, Victor and Jovi as they considered the impact they were having on their students without the use of extrinsic rewards. That sense of pride perhaps was itself an intrinsic reward for the teachers for the work they do with their students?

**Comprehending the Contribution of Culture and Gender on Reading**

The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.

- Dr. Seuss, *I Can Read with My Eyes Shut*

As the discussion about the experience of young boys developed, a superordinate theme emerged that reading was just harder for male students and took longer for them to master. This did not apply to all boys all the time, but there was enough of a discrepancy in achievement for all participants to recognize that gender did impact reading acquisition. The data also suggested that cultural differences can and do sway how students engage with literacy.
**Gender and differing reading compatibility.** A question that kept bubbling up as participants mulled around the experiences of the boys in their charge and how they had been affected by the change to a readers workshop was: Why indeed did gender even matter? Jovi said that she had found that boys were able to grasp concepts better if she was very concrete and linear in her explanations. She speculated that perhaps this allowed them to feel that they had some power over what was to come in the lesson, and this element of control helped them be better able to process the information:

I feel like with boys, you need to go in a direct line. You have to have a purpose, like a scope and sequence. They have to have a little bit more predictability of where you're going as far as reading strategy, to kind of keep them in and not lose their interest. I think the concrete aspect, but I think the control aspect as well. I think guys tend to want to have more of a hold on the situation. If you can say at the beginning of the week, “This is what we're doing. We're doing X, Y and Z, at the level of.” I can kind of prep my mind to have more control over the situation, or more control over my learning. Therefore, I'm a little bit more comfortable with this.

This impression by Jovi, that somehow gender was at play in her reading classroom, caused her to make a conscious decision to make subtle adjustments to her teaching strategies. She was not too concerned about why the boys learned differently, but she recognized that there was enough of a difference in their learning styles to warrant an adjustment. While not all boys are going to learn in a linear manner any more than all girls are going to learn in a more holistic way, more children can be reached if the learning outcomes are clear and accessible to all students. Teaching in a purposeful manner so students understand the path that the lessons are taking creates an inclusive place within the learning environment and gives students time to
process what is about to come. This solidifies the idea that the teacher and the students are sharing the journey together.

Participants suggested that the type of texts often found in classrooms factored into students’ willingness to engage with reading. Grace summed up the frustrations of the group when she said:

I find that the boys, at least, just in general, I find that it's hard to get the boys to read. I tend to find that it's harder for me to find things for them to read that they're interested in; whereas, the girls I can go and just pick out pretty much anything, and they'll read it or attempt to read it. Boys, it's very difficult. I have to ask them, "What are you interested in?" I try to find things based on their interests and what they tell me because it's really tough if it's something they're not interested in as much, it seems, in my opinion they will not engage.

Others echoed Grace’s experience with seeking books that might capture the imagination of their boy readers. Considerable literature argues that males tend to read in order to further an already existing interest. This desire to build on preexisting knowledge ultimately restricts their exposure to new texts, but does indicate a willingness to read if the material holds value for them. Girls might be willing to read more of the books in the classroom because they tend to be female centered or are based on some kind relationship or moral. Relationships and connections are perhaps not as important to young male readers. Male preferences for non-fiction appear to continue into adulthood (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014).

Gender is thus both a blessing and a curse. The boys are more fact oriented, which serves them well in reading non-fiction, but they struggle with embracing fiction if they have no voice in the choice of text. The role of gender in the selection of books in classroom libraries should
perhaps be noted by those who order books for schools, so they can provide books that are engaging for all.

Eva felt that movement and space were essential elements that helped boys learn. She shared that she felt that boys sometimes needed to move to learn. To aid their brains, she set up areas where they could be moving without impacting others:

I also feel like my boys, they just need to move around. They can be laying on the carpet kicking their feet around, but that actually helps some of them read. Not that the girls don't like to move, but not like some of the boys. It's just that at least maybe happier boys. They're better if they're on the carpet reading than at the desk.

Eva, as a mother of a son and a daughter, knew from first-hand experience how similar and different the genders can be in various aspects of their life. So while Eva did not explicitly recall her own children’s learning habits here, she was able to draw on those experiences to justify allowing her students to move in her learning space. Movement does not harm anyone, but aids boys who have a hard time sitting still. This provision for movement is significant, as in more traditional classrooms educators tend to have students sitting in their seats with little wriggle room allowed. If Eva’s experience that boys are more wriggly in classrooms is common, then it is possible to understood how gender impacts a teacher's perception of student engagement. If teachers are uncomfortable with allowing movement in the classrooms, this could reduce the willingness and capability of the male child to focus on reading in school.

This mindfulness about movement and the value it brings to the learning capacity of some students underlines Eva’s commitment to helping all her students. Conscious thinking about space in classrooms had been featured in discussion as the teachers undertook their journey of readers workshop implementation. Room layout had to be rethought because spaces and
control of certain areas were being relinquished to maximize learning. The resulting effect on learning differences between the genders is not often considered. However, as Eva realized, allowing movement when reading can help students build stamina and focus, and thus deepen reading skills.

As the participants shared a consensus about the key points that had been discussed, particularly the differences in gender preference regarding genres read, more inclusive teaching styles, and the apparent effect of movement in the reading lives of boys. As the participants reflected on these elements, they sought ways to express why this happened, and why it mattered.

Bella, who was a mother with a son in school, seemed to synthesize the thoughts of the participants around how gender seemed to influence reading compatibility when she said, “I also think, and I don't know why this is, but I think it just truly is later for boys, strong literacy skills. That makes it a little tougher in the early days to really love it." This late skills acquisition obviously was not the case for all boys in her care, but she had seen enough of a trend over her career of 25 years in the classroom to feel confident in sharing this opinion. Supporting this knowledge were her personal experiences within her family, especially her frustration with engaging her own children in reading. Bella qualified her feelings by suggesting that this delay in reading was not because they were behind; rather, there were other factors in play:

I think a lot of boys ... I don't know. Literacy comes slower and harder for the majority of them. I don't mean to say that they're behind. I just think somehow reading and writing just comes a little bit later. I can't put my finger on it. I don't know what it is exactly…I think, unfortunately, reading still appeals to girls more than boys even though there are so
much better boys' literature available than there was 5 years, 10 years ago, and certainly 15 years ago.

Bella did not feel that boys cannot learn, but rather that they learn differently than their female peers. One must consider whether these differences in reading ability are related to gender alone, or does if the environment boys find themselves in as they enter reading classrooms gets in the way of their reading engagement. No matter which has more impact, the environment or the child’s sex, it appears that learning is hindered enough students to make the achievement gap between the genders a worldwide phenomenon. Gender therefore is an important factor in reading compatibility.

Ultimately, as the influence gender can make on a child’s learning is acknowledged, educators would be wise to consider creating child-centered learning environments that are not privileged in either gender’s favor. Within any given classroom there will be accomplished readers of both sexes, but the worldwide trend is that more male students are categorized as struggling and inadequate when it comes to reading. Simple steps taken to understand that students can read when moving, and that teaching styles can become more inclusive, could go a long way in helping male students overcome their biology to enjoy reading alongside their female peers.

**Reading cultural differences.** It became apparent that culture must also be acknowledged as a factor in some students’ lives. The influence of culture emerged even though none of the interview questions explicitly referenced culture. The influence of culture seemed to surface around the varying values that parents in the school community placed on reading – not just the skill of reading but also the importance of reading for pleasure outside the class, which research shows builds vocabulary, fluency, and desire to read. Some parents who acknowledge
they want their students to read are nevertheless not supporting this activity outside the classroom. Ultimately the participants determined that the students were receiving conflicting messages and were working through the implications. Jovi explained that in some families she has worked with reading and the desire to build a love of literature was dismissed as being a non-essential part of school life:

I think that kind of going back to "why does a guy need to cook? That's a girl's job," so why does a guy need to be proficient in a "soft art." You should be focusing on math and science because in your culture, that's what guys do. We kind of look at it from our aspect, reading transcends every subject. To some cultures, it's like "no, no, no. You don't need to have this breadth of knowledge of literature, or understanding poetry. You need calculus, you need hard sciences. That's what you should be focusing on.

As Jovi indicated through her recollections of conversations with community members, it is apparent that within the very diverse population at the research site there are differing views on the value of reading for pleasure. This differing value system can be a focus of future parent informational seminars. If through multiple engagements with parents the school can change their mindset, then more of the students who are feeling pressured to focus on math even in the younger grades might be given the freedom to become more interested in reading. Additionally, as parents become more informed about the importance of reading for its own sake, they can work with the teachers to share the interests and passions of their child. This will help the teachers as they strive to find books that would engage their students.

When participants talked through their thoughts about how culture comes into play in their classrooms, it was at times like peeling away the layers of an onion. Each layer of the onion revealed another glimpse into factors that were affecting their teaching, factors that they had not
verbalized or consciously acknowledged before. Jovi, who like all the participants recognized the challenges of working with students who were non English speakers, expanded on the thinking of the others when she suggested that it is not only the English skills that get in the way, but also the attitudes of the students. These attitudes were perhaps being swayed by homes where reading was not celebrated or acknowledged:

I think a huge aspect, this is an international school, is the whole English learner barrier, that not only are you dealing with males who may not be that keen to be involved in reading instruction, even in their native language.

So why are these students not keen to read? The school has over 90 nationalities in its student body, so we need to examine which communities are struggling the most with reading so that more support can be provided. Are values at home negatively impacting willingness to read? Are their cultures engaging in such huge transitions as they emerge into the 21st century with affluence and power that they struggle to hold on to their history, and so the value of reading is somewhat left to chance as traditions had previously given precedence to the reading and memorization of holy scriptures? Or, in their home countries it may be difficult to acquire quality children’s literature. In many societies across the world over this is taken for granted when shopping for books. However, for some communities the development of homegrown children’s authors may be impeded because historically children’s literature was shared through oral traditions rather than the written word. One final consideration that could influence the resistance of some of the students who are non English speaking to read in their mother tongue is that in the Arab world much of what is written and deemed as children’s literature has heavy religious moral overtones. These difficult and dull texts for students interact with the conflict of
being educated in an American school with its associated values as well as their possibly more conservative home life.

Bella noted a struggle that is being faced in the wider community: the value of literacy in the home. Many Western societies have been aware for some time of the importance of modeling literacy practices within family settings. Within the local community of the research site, this understanding is only now being developed. Bella pinpointed this when she was considering how cultural expectations were influencing the reading lives of the students in her care:

I think the cultural differences would apply to the boys and the girls. I think it had to do with literacy in the home. When you're dealing with a population whose first language is not English and these parents might not know to read to their children from a young age or have print around the house or be home to read to them.

As Bella continued to muse over this dilemma, she summed up her feelings that, at least for the host country students in her care, “I think that it may take a generation to kind of work through.”

By reflecting on the male children in the classrooms and understanding their families, it can be appreciated that children who are from families that do not model reading at home as a source of pleasure and value face greater challenges in understanding their teacher's passion for reading. This knowledge then provides the impetus for continuing to hone the conferencing skills of the classroom teachers as they seek ways to build bridges with one child at a time to overcome cultural norms while still being respectful of community values.

**Changing Perspectives**

Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.

- George Bernard Shaw, *The wit and wisdom of George Bernard Shaw.*
The research participants’ reflections on how the young boys in their care had understood the shift in pedagogy and their experiences in class led to thoughts about how they as teachers had changed during the past year. The participants had years of experience and had taught reading in a variety of ways. Despite their varied background, they all recognized the positive impact the shift had made and how they had become learners in the classroom alongside the students. They realized through their reflections that they were better placed to engage their students and make learning more accessible to all.

**Emerging readers workshop teacher.** Bella highlighted the power of the shift in instruction and also captured the greatest fear of any teacher. Teachers fear that they are not proficient at instructing a particular part of the curriculum, but are students as well, learning on a very steep curve alongside the pupils. The anxiety of not being an expert is what makes people hang onto the familiar despite evidence showing that a new method will be superior:

- I think that the benefits of readers workshop are so great, they're worth that 6 months or 12 months before you really feel comfortable with it. I still think even an emergent readers workshop teacher is better than whole group instruction or non differentiated reading instruction.

Bella’s reflection centered on the positive effect on all students, which validated the discomfort, risk, and extra effort of being in uncharted teaching territory. Bella was a confident and knowledgeable individual, which perhaps made her more willing to show her vulnerabilities with her students and colleagues.

The shift in practice gave Eva an opportunity to reflect on how her teaching practice had changed from when she had worked at a school that had been more test driven. The essence of engaging students with books they were passionate about had been lost in the world of testing.
The students took second place to the gathering of district wide test data. Now, however, Eva could focus on the students in her care instead of numbers on a spreadsheet:

I feel like when I worked at a Title 1 school, it became very rote memorization and just getting the kids, trying to catch them up somehow in a lot of testing and all that. I prefer this so much better and I think it works for these kids, this population. I think it's great.

Focusing on students and giving them a voice in the classroom powerfully supports learning. If teaching is all decoding and memory skills, then teachers are not providing room for intrinsic motivation to be created within the students. Instead students will become test-taking experts with no passion for their work.

Grace supported Eva’s position on the value of the change when she pointed out that “I think the benefit is that it's not structured in the sense that's it's, ‘Do A, B, and C.’ It's how we introduce reading to them, and how we introduce the concepts. It was very natural.” This idea that teaching has a meaningful, natural flow that encapsulates the authenticity of learning for students and teachers has real life application. This concept of flow helps reluctant readers because it provides an avenue through which they could more readily understand the value of the learning and apply it to their work.

Victor’s passion bubbled over as he spoke of the power and the impact of the shift in teaching on his students. His core belief was that this approach to reading had reached all his students because the differentiated instruction allowed struggling readers to engage and make progress:

I highly believe, however, that this is one year out of these children's education careers, and if this doesn't proceed, certainly through elementary school, then you'll have much more difficulty seeing that academic progress that we saw during this school year. Our
grade level goal was that 75 percent of our students could show some type of academic growth through the DRA assessments. We easily made that goal this year. Easily made that goal. I highly think that that is not entirely, but a great deal of that goal being met is because we had a structured reading program that was differentiated to all students' learning levels.

The shift in thinking about reading and the impact of his work was tangible as Victor explained his thinking. This change in pedagogy created an environment within the participants’ classrooms that allowed for robust engagement through differentiation and hearing student voices, which in turn resulted in higher learning goals being met and exceeded by the students. Moreover, he firmly stated that a change in reading attitudes had been created and if this were not capitalized on then an opportunity would have been missed. Victor had experienced the struggles of a rapidly expanding school population at the research site. He worked with limited resources in those earlier years and was now seeing the impact of a shared philosophy and approach to reading. His vigorous enthusiasm for the workshop model and his willingness to do extra work alongside all his other responsibilities potentially affects others in the school as they wonder if this approach is worth their effort to learn.

The changed perspectives of these emergent readers workshop teachers are important to consider. Demands on teachers are high at the research site and in schools around the world. When teachers choose to take on change initiatives recognize that they as teachers have changed, leading to positive effects on the students in their care, we must further examine the cause of that change. The participants of the study came from very different parts of North America. Despite these differences, they saw promise in this approach, such that when Eva said, “I'm going to move forward and keep growing,” she could have been speaking for all of them.
Summary

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis was to explore what teachers involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practice understood and believed about this experience for young male students. The sub-question was to discover the experiences of teachers who teach boys during this shift in practice to a readers workshop model. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews that allowed teachers to reflect and comment through a detailed narrative, which provided a rich portrait of how educators and students made sense of the experience. Responses were transcribed verbatim and shared in this chapter.

Four superordinate themes emerged as the data was analyzed. **Effects of shifting pedagogy** was the first superordinate theme to emerge from the data. Participants noted a change in practice as the result of three subordinate themes: **Rethinking practice; Readers workshop impact on learning,** and **Raising accountability of students.** **Constructing a learning community** was the second superordinate theme, which detailed participants’ thoughts about what it took to create such a learning environment. The subordinate themes of this second group were: **Genres and engaging high-interest books; Authenticity of learning;** and **Rewarding students.**

**Comprehending the contribution of culture and gender on reading** was the third superordinate theme. Teachers sought ways to understand the influence of students’ origin and gender on learning. The subordinate themes of **Gender and differing reading compatibility** and **Reading cultural differences** emerged. Finally, the superordinate theme **Changing perspectives** from the teacher's point of view and its subordinate theme **Emerging readers workshop teacher** became apparent as participants placed themselves into the learning environment as key participants. These superordinate and subordinate themes represent the essential experiences of the participants as they considered and reflected on the male students in their care, and their
subsequent experiences as they perceived them.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

This research study was guided by this central question: What do teachers who are involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practices understand and believe about this experience for young male students? The sub-question to this was: What do teachers experience when using a readers workshop method of instruction for male students? Readers workshop is defined for the purpose of this study as an approach to reading instruction structured around the framework devised by Calkins (2015).

This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was designed to hear the voices of the teachers who were intimately involved in the day-to-day interactions with young male readers as they experienced firsthand the change in instructional methods at the research site. As IPA is a process of collecting data that is best suited for hearing the lived experiences of those involved through deep and reflective interviews and note taking (Smith et al., 2009), it was felt that this methodology would provide the richest insight into the classroom experiences of the participants and their students. Additionally, analyzing the teacher's perspectives regarding young male engagement with reading through a lens of self-determination theory (SDT) allowed for a nuanced understanding of how the teachers felt the change in reading instruction had affected the boys in their care, and as a result their learning. SDT holds that for an individual to feel competent, and thus build intrinsic motivation to participate in an activity, three criteria must be present: feeling effective autonomy, feeling in charge of one’s actions and relatedness, and feeling understood and connected to others.

Through careful analysis of data collected from the five participants, all teachers at the research site who had been educated in North America and were citizens of either the United States or Canada, four superordinate themes emerged: *Effects of shifting pedagogy, Constructing*
a learning community, Comprehending the contribution of culture and gender on reading, and Changing perspectives. All these superordinate themes were supported by subordinate themes. While the participants’ impressions and understandings of this experience are very personal, such findings provide an opportunity for the research site to examine its practice and understandings regarding reading instruction.

The literature and the interviews both underlined the importance of acknowledging that educators must adapt their teaching to raise accountability of students, not through testing but rather by engaging and challenging students to become more willing to set their own goals in reading. The journey to reach those goals can be accomplished through appealing and relevant books used in highly differentiated and collaborative community oriented learning environments. These shifts in thinking not only assist the male students but potentially enable all students, no matter their gender, to be more engaged and through that engagement become more intrinsically motivated to be an active learner in the classroom. These results are presented in the remainder of this chapter, first as they are related to the conceptual framework and then through the lens of how each theme may contribute to the literature on how to capture the imagination of young boys who do not value joining the world of literacy.

**Discussion of Findings Related to Conceptual Framework**

Self-determination theory, the conceptual framework used in this study, holds that three key components must be present for an individual to increase his or her motivation to participate in an activity. Ryan and Deci (1999) found that feelings of competence, connectedness, and autonomy were vital elements that needed to be in play to foster the development of self-motivation. The participants in this research study all supported these findings while considering the effects of the readers workshop architecture of instruction on the male students in their
classrooms.

Deci (1995) contended that it is not necessary to be the best at something to feel a sense of competency. Instead, the task in hand should have value to the individual -- intrinsic motivation is developed through engagement in that valued activity (Deci, 1995). Motivation comes from within as “the feeling of being effective is satisfying in its own right” (Deci, 1995).

As the participants reflected on the journey that their students had taken with them over the past year, this idea of students feeling like they were indeed all readers had woven its way into the class community. Of course students were at differing levels of competency, but participants believed the ethos and structure of the workshop model had changed students’ perceptions of themselves as they created a culture of reading. Bella shared her impressions of that sense of efficacy when she observed that as her students’ knowledge of how to choose “just right books” developed, their willingness to read grew as well. Instead of struggling with texts that were too difficult, the students knew how to access books that would leave them with a sense of being a competent reader:

I think right from the start, it empowered students to know how to pick books at their level. Then the reading experience is easier, because it's the right level and they want to read more… They're never being asked to read something that's too hard for them. Hopefully every experience they have is, sure, pushing them a little bit, but it's at a level that gives them a feeling of success and confidence to go forward.

What is critical in Bella’s analysis is that she recognized that the students were pushing themselves, and that the activity they were engaged in was not trivial or easy. This is a balance that the teachers were challenged with, how to nudge the students forward in a way that was neither too fast nor too slow. When individuals are challenged with tasks to complete, no sense
of competency is achieved if the activity is felt to be too easy. Rather, the person must recognize that they had to strive to reach the goal – though the goal must be reachable with that effort (Deci, 1995).

Ryan and Deci’s (1999) second element for the development of self-motivation, connectedness, was talked about by the participating teachers when they discussed how the sense of community in their learning spaces created a safe space for learning. Grace highlighted this component of SDT when she discussed how her students were very supportive of each other despite being aware that they were all at different points on their reading journey. She believed that this willingness to assist each other was due to the sense of community within her classroom. That community of learners even included Grace, as she put herself into the class community as a fellow student who made mistakes and learned from them. This willingness to place her learning into the classroom environment as a fellow risk-taker helped underline her sense of connectedness with her students. Indeed, Grace placed the idea into the classroom community that they were all part of a large family. In doing so Grace framed the meaning of connectedness for her students in a way they could understand. Young students readily appreciate family and the ties that bind them together.

Bella, like Grace, also felt that an essential element for success in reading was the need to create a venue for connecting with each other. Indeed, she pointed out that “the sense of community” was developed through the concept of “we are all readers and reading is thinking.” Indeed, this sense of community was a universal theme that emerged from the participants, as the foundational blocks for the creation of intrinsic motivation were being created and identified as key factors in the students’ learning. This connectedness is important, as when students feel valued within the classroom they are more willing to take on the expected norms of the learning
environment (Ryan & Deci, 1999). This is what will entice a reluctant individual to take on an activity, as they feel “that they are valued by significant others to whom they feel (or would like to feel) connected, whether that be a family, a peer group, or a society” (Ryan & Deci, 1999, p. 64).

Choice and autonomy, the third strand of SDT, is the final component for creating an environment where intrinsic motivation can be cultivated (Ryan & Deci, 1999). Whether it was the discussion about choice over what to read or about where students sit within the classroom, participants confirmed the importance of choice for the male students. Victor described how he had seen more engagement with reading now that the students not only had the power to choose their reading material but that there was a greater variety of genres available. He felt that allowing students the ability to channel their interests by selecting texts was very important; indeed, he contended that, “sometimes an interesting book would take priority over the students' reading level.” Bella echoed Victor’s sentiments regarding autonomy and the power of choice over reading material. She felt that young reluctant male readers thereby became “empowered” to participate in an area of learning that they were perhaps not as ready to embrace fully as their fellow students. Jovi described how this element of choice has been particularly powerful in that it removed an area of discomfort for students as they were not required to read texts that had little to no interest for them in these critical early years of instruction. This relinquishing of control by the teachers to the students for choice over which books they read, while appearing to be an easy goal to meet within the readers workshop, would most likely have created angst for many teachers. Relinquishing control to students can create a loss of power, messiness within a classroom, and uncertainty as students develop their own agency to make decisions around texts. However, students develop responsibility through such actions. Indeed this power of choice for
students underlines the work of Ryan and Deci (1999), who contended that situations that support autonomy are the only ones where individuals can fully internalize the value and design behind an activity. When an individual has embraced the value of the learning, self-regulation and self-motivation to participate is created. Indeed “autonomously-motivated students thrive in educational settings and students benefit when teachers support their autonomy” (Reeve, as cited in Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 183).

Participants all spoke to the positive change in engaging students through a workshop model with the activation of choice, autonomy, connectedness, competency, and feeling of connectedness, which is of particular importance at the research site where teachers were challenged to serve a very diverse group of students. If students who have been resistant to engaging with text can thereby discover that the words on the pages in front of them have intrinsic value for them and their world, then the potential for breaking through the barrier of non-participation can be created. Motivation is not an externally levied attribute (Deci, 1995), so an individual will only create the drive and passion for engaging with the challenging task of learning and participating in reading after a value is attached to it. In the end, it is important to recall that choice and student voice have far-reaching effects on achievement.

Discussion of Themes Related to Relevant Literature

Effects of Shifting Pedagogy

Within the superordinate theme Effects of shifting pedagogy, the subordinate themes Raising accountability of students, Rethinking practice, and Readers workshop impact on learning emerged. As they considered their practice, teachers revealed how they came to hold students accountable in a more child-centered manner. This reflection led to a consideration of how the architecture of the readers workshop had impacted their teaching and student learning.
Several studies (Bryan, 1999; Velluto & Barbousas, 2013) supported the findings of the teachers regarding meaningful accountability when they examined long established practices of sustained silent reading (SSR) or drop everything and read (DEAR). These methods, often used in reading classrooms, do nothing to hold students accountable for the work they are challenged to complete. Such methodologies will keep the already competent and appreciative reader engrossed in his or her book, however, those who are detached from the process of reading will not be enticed to connect when there is no accountability for their actions.

As participants mused about the concept of accountability in an inquiry centered classroom in a high expectation school environment, Bella captured the feelings of all the participants about the shift in accountability when she reflected on how readers workshop centers the process around differentiated individual conferencing and small intimate group work with the teacher. If students are not engaged, this becomes evident very quickly, and the teacher is able to remediate the situation to help students find texts that will interest them. It is important to appreciate that the concern about accountability was not viewed from a deficit model in which teachers would be out to catch students not on task, but rather from the perspective of support. The participants’ concern and vested interest in the growth of their students was deemed to be the impetus for holding students accountable for using their reading lessons effectively. Indeed, accountability by all members of the educational team to support and be involved in the learning keeps both students and teachers focused on the work of reading. It is important to appreciate that this learning team does include the students. The students themselves are not having education “done to them,” but rather must come to know that they are part of a group that is seeking to understand how to read, with all the nuances that accompany that life skill.
In addition to shifting accountability to being student centered, participants recognized that rethinking their practice had led classroom instruction to become more effective. Two particular areas emerged in this context: co-learning opportunities and student voice. Participants spoke of the strength of including students through the use of interactive read alouds. Grace shared that the students were more engaged when they were asked to be participants rather than passive listeners. These interactive read alouds were when students and teachers alike shared their thinking around the text. Fisher and Frey (2012) spoke of the powerful learning opportunities created when educators and students model their thinking processes. This dialogue made book content more accessible to struggling students. In addition, research has found that when students were allowed to engage with peers in a learning environment, they were more able to see the value of the skill being taught (Bausch, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2012). Once a value has been attached to a skill, there was a greater willingness among reluctant males to embrace the targeted skills (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014).

As the participants examined and analyzed the read aloud, it was evident that the participants had thought long and hard about their practice. Such reflection is a powerful learning experience. Indeed the teachers themselves could have been experiencing the same internal shift in value attachment for the read aloud that Wilhelm and Smith (2014) recognized in reluctant males. As part of their reflection on rethinking practice, the participants reviewed their previous teaching approach, in which all students had read the same texts in basal readers, followed page by page. They recognized that this type of instruction did little to motivate, as there was no recognition of student voice. Marinak (2013) attested to this in his work on motivation in students, finding that when students were given more voice and control over not
only the text they are reading but in the open-ended tasks they were assigned, students were better able to make connections to the text.

As the thread of student voice developed, the participants were able to consider the impact of the readers workshop architecture on their practice. The shift in their teaching to short mini lessons and purposeful conferencing allowed the teacher to talk less and listen more. This change facilitated more engagement, because students were reading what interested them, they had more time to read, and they were being asked to be active participants in their learning through the individual conferencing. During the conferencing, students were invited to reflect on where they presently were as a reader and what they needed to work towards next. This active participation in reflection was a significant finding for the research site because self-reflection is an essential skill nurtured across the curriculum at an IB PYP school.

Several studies (Au and Carroll, 1997; Fives et al., 2014; Porath, 2014) attested to the influence of self-reflection for building self-esteem, especially in male students, and that students can become dynamically engaged through involvement in their own learning (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004). Eva confirmed these findings when she said that a student’s motivation to read was increased when he or she received feedback during conferencing time as they established learning goals to work towards. It must be appreciated, however, that conferencing like any other teaching practice is a skill that must be developed. These conferencing skills are something learned by the teacher and the student. As such, the work of the participants in this study in the conferencing component of the lesson can be understood as an expertise that was honed and developed over the course of the year. Despite the steep learning curves of the participants, the work conducted at the research site has been shown to also be effective in other venues where
focus shifted towards what was best for students instead of accountability on tests (Fletcher et al., 2011).

**Constructing a Learning Community**

When the participants considered the challenges and experiences of the male students in their care as they moved to a readers workshop model of instruction, the powerful concept of community within the learning space arose. Bella expounded on the force of a sense of belonging for the students, “the sense of community, I think it’s that idea of we are all readers and reading is thinking.” She felt that this was an empowering notion for the students. Eva echoed this sentiment when she suggested, “the kids feel really safe and take chances.” The creation of such learning environments is critical for struggling or reluctant readers. The design of the readers workshop builds space for all students to be exposed to higher level thinking skills around text. These skills can then be applied in a book of choice, with a complexity that they can handle and works to lay the foundation for an inclusive environment. The critical concepts are that all members of the class are readers and that all students can find books to be part of the learning community.

Senn (2012), in his work on engaging and motivating reluctant readers, suggested that if teachers were willing to consider options other than the classic children’s literature in classrooms, and allow students to read what they are passionate about, the divide between readers and nonreaders could be bridged. The concept of choice is particularly important for young boys, as research attests that they tend to read to further an already existing interest. By allowing choice in the texts being read, teachers are tapping into a pre-existing intrinsic motivation to learn more about a topic (Senn, 2012). Jovi summed up the importance of choice for struggling readers when she stated that, “If you have a reader who's already struggling, and
they're not interested in the genre, then you're not really going to reach them, as far as skills and objectives.” What it is imperative to reflect on in Jovi’s statement is the need to understand that many genres and types of book are possible gateways to the learning of reading (Brozo, 2011; Wilhelm & Smith, 2014). This understanding can be developed not only in teachers but also in students so that they build an appreciation that their interests within books are no less valid than those of their peers. This idea is essential, as without this concept being fully appreciated greater divides will be created between those who read and those who do not (Brozo et al., 2014).

The way students are engaged in reading instruction research has been shown to be a key factor in the willingness of students to participate in learning, and thus in the learning community (Reutzel et al., 2014; Watson & Kehler, 2012). The authenticity of learning or the realness of the activity is a key factor in providing the setting for engagement. Indeed Duke et al. (2008 defined such learning as when the learning being asked of the student replicates an action that may arise in real life. The positive influence on students of seeing the real-world application of particular reading skills was supported by the participants, who attested to the effects of such strategies with their students. Bella focused on this idea when she pointed out that no matter their age if students did not feel that the learning engagement was real, they would not participate. “Nobody’s interested, I don’t care if you’re 6 or 60, if you think it's not real or important you’re not going to engage.”

Bella, who had the opportunity to be in many classrooms during her day, could accurately speak to what authentic learning looked like in practice. This honing of authentic learning engagements could be an area the research site could investigate because the tasks given to students create the foundation for motivation and thus engagement (Hudson & Williams, 2015; Marinak, 2013).
As the participants dissected the elements that went into creating a reading community within their classrooms, the subject of rewards for being a reader was discussed. The teachers were all clear about the limited value of extrinsic rewards for reading. Their consensus was that extrinsic rewards such as stickers were only going to reach certain students, and would do nothing to build a passion for reading in the struggling readers. Jovi placed her thinking squarely in the tradition of Ryan and Deci (1999) when she pointed out that students would build motivation through the very differentiated and personal feedback they received, in which they heard what they were doing well and were included in goal setting for the next steps. Intrinsic motivation was being created as they became part of the reachable goal setting process. Victor also tapped into Ryan and Deci’s (1999) work on extrinsic rewards when he stated that such prizes do nothing to create a community of learners but instead become a self-serving exercise for already engaged students.

It was evident that the participants did not believe in the power of extrinsic awards and emphasized building intrinsic motivation. How much their thinking had changed on this subject since they had arrived at the school could not be gauged, however it is important to consider that their opinions may have been influenced by the work they were conducting in their reading classrooms and the general ethos of the school in which they worked. Nevertheless, their thoughts aligned with the psychologists Ryan and Deci (1999), who are acknowledged as the authorities on what creates motivation in humans through their studies on the various effects of rewards on behavior. They found that if an extrinsic reward is used to motivate and then is subsequently removed, the desired behavior disappears when the prize goes away. When considering the effect of rewards in classrooms, particularly when they are designed for luring reluctant readers to read, research clearly supports that extrinsic motivation creates a reward
oriented learning environment where students will take the shortest route to gain their prize (Deci, 1995). The students become fixated on the reward more than on the learning, and thus no desire or self-motivation to learn for the skill’s sake is created. This creates divides within the classroom between those who just want to acquire the rewards and those who actually have intrinsic motivation to inquire into the reading process.

**Comprehending the Contribution of Culture and Gender**

Numerous studies around the world have examined the differences in reading achievement between boys and girls. As reported by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), girls routinely outperform their male peers in comprehension and engagement, and also attach more value to the skill of reading (Brozo et al., 2014). All the participants shared how they had experienced such differences when it came to reading. Bella, who has a young son and daughter in elementary school, spoke to this phenomenon with passion. She felt that the skills of reading just developed later for many boys than for girls. As the member of the group who was living this phenomenon both within her professional life and her personal one, she could speak with some insight. Research into brain development has found that male and female brains do in fact grow at differing rates (Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Spironelli et al., 2010). These differences perhaps explain some of the more fidgety behavior that boys can exhibit in classrooms.

Eva, in her reflection on how gender was impacting her students’ learning, discussed how she allowed students to move around while developing their reading skills. She was providing an outlet for students who need to move rather than punishing them for not conforming to traditionally accepted norms of behavior in classrooms. Such accommodations within the classroom set up and physical layout potentially have far reaching benefits, especially in a school
where outside play can be severely hampered due to extremely high temperatures for several months a year. Research has attested to the power of movement in classrooms in countries like Finland, where hands-on learning activities have sought to remove students from desk-bound activities (Morgan, 2014; Ridgway & Quinones, 2012; Webb et al., 2006). Allowing movement in the classroom is significant because the ability to regulate oneself in classrooms has been shown to have a significant impact on a student's journey through school (Matthews et al., 2009; Below et al., 2010). Furthermore, research supports the value of an approach to learning that allows natural and non-judgmental spaces for students to develop these self-regulation skills.

As the participants reflected on how gender impacted the learning of students, Jovi echoed the literature as she outlined steps she took to help students feel successful. Research has shown that males need to feel successful at an activity before they fully engage (Senn, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Wilhelm & Smith, 2014). This need to feel competent limits their willingness to take on new concepts in reading or even try new genres or book titles. This unwillingness to step into unknown territory severely limits their reading experiences and thus the development of their reading skills. To help mitigate this, Jovi laid out the plan that the class was going to take each week so the students could begin to process the next steps ahead of time. In doing this, Jovi was activating the ideas and theories of Marzano and Toth (2013), who suggested that teachers should be clear with students about what they want them to learn. This inclusion of the students in the planned path of instruction helps boys see value in the learning because, as Senn (2012) pointed out, male students need to see the value of the activity before they exert any effort. If they perceive that there is no value attached to the learning they will avoid it and instead read familiar short texts to avoid frustration (Senn, 2012). While there are many statistics about the experiences of male readers floundering in classrooms, it is important
to hear the words of the teachers who are taking measures to mitigate the influence of gender on reading engagement. Jovi placed herself in a position of being perceived by her students as a caring individual who facilitated authentic interactions with her students.

Added to this was an issue that has been explored by multiple studies (Brozo, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2012; McGeown, 2015; Zambo, 2007), how books may entice reluctant readers into reading. The research does not suggest that libraries should have gender bound book selections, but that they should include texts that show females and males in multiple ways so that students can seek many ways to identify with the characters in the text. The power of a wide variety of texts was echoed by the participants as they spoke to the challenges of finding books that would appeal to reluctant readers. They felt that as the research site had endeavored to fill gaps in classroom libraries so that all genres were included, with a wide variety of texts that reflected the lives of the students, there had been a change in their reading classrooms. The struggling and reluctant readers now had more choices from which to find something of interest to read. Wood and Jocius (2013) attested to the significance of such texts being placed in classrooms, as the books become mirrors of the lives of the reader, validating that life. Eva acknowledged the power of such books when she raised the ever-contentious books series *Capt. Underpants* as being a perennial winner with her students and one that she was very happy for her students to read. By acknowledging such texts, she was tapping into the power of books that appeal. Indeed *Capt. Underpants* has endured over nearly 20 years of publication because young students can identify with this perceived subversive text and its rebellious characters and their teachers. This book that is about the world as seen from a young elementary student’s perspective is not heavy on metaphor and symbolism, and young resistant male readers may more readily associate it with their world.
The research site had 90 different nationalities among its student body, and some community members held beliefs and attitudes regarding literacy that were not aligned with the values of its teaching staff and culture. Some of these mixed values were related to lack of knowledge and exposure to other ways of thinking. Jovi shared in her reflections how sexist commentary had questioned why boys needed to read: “You need calculus, you need hard sciences.” This mindset was not unique to this research site, as research has shown that many boys perceive reading as a female pastime (Senn, 2012; Sokal et al., 2009; Zambo, 2007). However, Scholes (2010) contended that often these mindsets are linked to socioeconomic status, with low status having a larger adverse effect on the willingness to read. At the research site, no child could be considered in any way in a low socioeconomic situation as all parents pay significant school fees. So the negative attitudes attached to reading could instead be connected to cultural values and a perception that literature skills were less valuable for a career than math.

Cultural norms certainly come into play when considering the lack of male role models with reading. This is of particular concern in the Gulf region where the research site is located: in 2013 in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Countries) boys performed worse than girls on the PISA (program for international student assessment), TIMSS (Trends in mathematics and science study), and PIRLS assessments (Ridge, 2014). Such discrepancies in attainment are significant, as they impact not only the research site but also the wider community. Bella picked up on this point when she discussed differences in achievement for her male students once she factored in their heritage. Western societies have for a period of time, she explained, been aware of the value of modeling reading in the home environment. However, many of the students at the research site are of the first generation that is being raised by parents who all attended school, as public schools were not opened until 1971 (Ridge, 2014). Statistics on literacy within the UAE show
that “in the period 1984–1994, adult literacy was 72% for males and 69% for females; in the years 2005–2010, adult literacy had risen to 89% for males and 91% for females” (Ridge, 2014, loc. 482). Thus these parents very likely did not have reading modeled for them and are just now being shown the value of such endeavors through initiatives taken by the local government (UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2016).

**Changing Perspectives**

As research attests, the teacher in the room plays a significant role in student learning (Flynt & Brozo, 2009; Porath, 2014). As the participants reflected on the experiences that their male students had gone through during the shift in instructional practices, they were able to recognize the change that had also occurred in themselves. These teachers acknowledged that the student had become the focus instead of just being a compliant element in a quest to reach some externally levied test score on reading. Victor spoke with authority on how he was able to focus on each student through the student-centered differentiated approach that was facilitated by the readers workshop architecture. One of the keys for the success of instruction in reading, Porath (2014) suggested, occurs when teachers confer with students. This conferring is not an opportunity to lecture students on a topic but rather an opportunity to listen and engage students in a conversation about books. Such communications make it possible to unearth potential roadblocks to learning and discover what interests them. Flynt and Brozo (2009) suggested that by finding out what students know teachers can guide students to make connections to prior knowledge and move them along their reading journey.

Such teaching requires educators to change their approach and adopt new ways of assessing and teaching students. While there may be fear of not being an expert at this type of teaching, Bella adamantly believed that “an emergent readers workshop teacher is better than
whole group instruction or non differentiated reading instruction.” By talking less and listening more, teachers shift their perspective within a reading classroom (Porath, 2014)

Overall the participants echoed the literature about the value of readers workshop instruction for young male readers. The differentiated instruction and the inclusion of student voice and choice in the reading material, which are core components of the architecture of readers workshop, align with what the literature suggests are essential elements required to engage struggling and reluctant boys in a reading classroom.

**Conclusion**

This study identified four superordinate themes and nine supporting subordinate themes that add to the qualitative literature and knowledge about the experiences of young male students in reading classrooms, as understood through the eyes of their teachers. While there is a lot of research on reading discrepancies between the genders, little has been written through the lens of the lived experiences of those most intimately involved in a shift in reading pedagogy: the student and the teacher. This study looked at the experience of a purposeful change in reading instruction to a readers workshop model, its effects in particular on the young boys, and the resulting changes wrought in the teachers who undertook this change in pedagogy. The participants were able to recognize these changes in themselves as a result of being a part of this study.

Looking at reading instruction through the eyes of those who live the experience is an area for further study. While it is hard to hear the voices of young students, it is only by actually understanding what they experience that teaching practices can adapt to become inclusive of all learners. Further research could clarify whether big publishing houses and state initiatives are reaching their intended goal of assisting young students along their reading journey. This
clarification would ask if reading initiatives were successful across gender, socioeconomic status, cultural values, and traditions, and to what extent they supported teachers as they sought ways to create more inclusive classrooms. Larger samples of participants could be included in future studies, with the voices of the students being heard either through their own words or through those of their teachers.

**Limitations**

This study described the experiences of five teachers who were willing to embrace a readers workshop model of instruction within their teaching space. The limited number of participants was guided by the methodology employed in the study. The sample size enabled the researcher to gain a rich narrative of each participant’s experience in relation to the study question. However, this sample size limits the findings, as teachers who were not involved in the initiative to move to a readers workshop were not included. It is possible that the experiences that they shared of the young boys’ experiences in their care might have been told differently by educators who were not included in this study.

In addition, because the participants had similar educational journeys and cultural backgrounds and worked with students who despite their varied backgrounds were from a similar socioeconomic status, the transferability of the study could be limited. Because this study was focused on five participants who all worked at the same location, which was a private international school, the results of the study could be limited to that research site as their experiences could be unique to it.

**Implications for Educational Practice**

The goal of this study was to understand what teachers in a school where a purposeful shift to a readers workshop model of instruction occurred understood and believed about this
experience for young boys. Through the voices of practitioners who are intimately involved in
the day to day instruction of male students, a spotlight could be focused on which factors had the
most positive impact on these students’ reading experiences so that others might benefit from
similar strategies throughout the research site. While this study has been able to fulfill its initial
goal, opportunities to look at other schools within the local community have been presented.
These opportunities arose through conversation with individuals involved in the teaching of
reading who recognize the challenges faced when seeking to engage young boys in the world of
literacy. If this methodology can reach students within the diverse student body of the research
site, then it has implications for other international schools or schools which have a highly
diverse population. The potential to delve into an examination of their current teaching practices
to determine if they are student centered or driven by numbers on a spreadsheet cannot be
ignored.

Such reflections could occur regularly as part of the expected practice of the school.
Educators by having the opportunity to consider their role within the classroom potentially
understanding the work they conduct at a more nuanced level. Such reflection could be
undertaken in a solitary endeavor or through the forum of a caring and supportive professional
learning community. Such groups are providing non-judgemental and thought provoking
environments in which all voices can be heard and considered. As through such purposeful
reflection on the part of the educator, opportunities can be created to carefully analysis the
journey that both student and teacher are on in the 21st-century reading classroom. Through such
analysis, it may be possible to pinpoint elements of instruction that need to be refined so that all
students needs are being addressed.

Additionally, there is a potential to examine in more depth the alignment of the readers
workshop approach to instruction and how the architecture of the approach aligns with the IB PYP program of instruction. These two entities are changing the way teaching is being conducted in schools all over the world, and as such an examination of how they could support each other as educators seek out ways to reach all students is an area of study that could support many schools.

Furthermore, as educators the world over struggle to engage reluctant readers of both genders the strength of goal setting with students that are real and attainable cannot be dismissed. More exploration of the power of such practices for students no matter the age is a viable investigation. Children as all humans like to feel the accomplishment of meeting and then exceeding a goal that they set with guidance. By examining such practices the potential to build intrinsic motivation in the most reluctant readers could be developed.

Interwoven into this idea of student's voice in the classroom there is an avenue for investigation which might look at how students can become aware that reading is not only that which occurs in the classroom. Reading happens everywhere in their life as they study their favorite pastimes. As such those students who are the most resistant to literacy in all its facets may through being shown that their choices about what to read in and out of school are valuable can begin to build a self-belief in their reading capacity.

Finally, the need to move to a more student-centered, inquiry-driven approach to the teaching of reading is supported by research as being an effective strategy for engaging all students, no matter their gender. Thus there are opportunities to consider case studies to examine the lives of young boys in reading classrooms so that the nuances of each setting within schools, domestic or internationally, private or public, can be fully explored.
Personal Reflection

A large part of my time as an educator has been in classrooms working with students in the lower elementary grades as they began their journey into literacy. I have witnessed the experiences of these students through two lenses: that of a teacher and that of a mother of two energetic, wild boys who came into the world of literacy in different ways. Both of my children benefitted from having teachers who understood them and talked to them about what reading interested them. Their experiences impacted my work with the students who were in my care as I sought ways to engage young boys in reading. I understood that sometimes students, no matter the gender, need choice in reading material and space to move around as they read. My preferences regarding “good books” should not be planted into these young minds, as I am not aware of all their possible interests and motivations for reading.

Through this study, added to my prior experiences, I have become more committed to removing basal readers from classrooms within my sphere of influence. The same story for all just does not work in the formative years while students are developing their preferences around genre and style. I cannot speak to the rights and wrongs of this approach in the upper grades where students are required to study core texts for external exams, but it seems likely that no one book is a great fit for all no matter the individual's age. Additionally, I am more certain than ever of my conviction that a readers workshop architecture approach to literacy instruction offers the most inquiry, student-centered approach to reading instruction. This can make a difference in reading skill acquisition. This conviction has been solidified by the commentary of the teachers in this study, who were new to the method but felt that it had changed the experiences of the students in their charge. These differences spoke to the higher engagement of students, and their
willingness to be risk takers by joining class discussions. The data that this study provided convinced me that I had to make the case to my supervisors that we needed to speed up the implementation of readers workshop throughout the elementary school. That decision was indeed made for the 2016 school year with support from not only the teachers involved in this study but from others who had seen the work they were undertaking. This enthusiasm has been infectious. Those individuals who were still holding onto basal readers and teacher guides relinquished them to set up their classrooms for a readers workshop approach.

The work that was undertaken at the research site to incorporate the readers workshop approach into a PYP elementary school governed by strict local laws has prompted communication not only between other schools in the city but also with a literacy specialist located in another country. As I move forward with these conversations, I know that I will keep the words of my participating teachers in my mind as I reflect on the power of the work they do each day. I look forward to sharing practices and ideas with other educators around choice and engagement for students in the classrooms. In the end, something so powerful deserves further attention and time.
References


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https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9817.2012.01546.x


https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2014.983013


Appendix A

Letter of introduction to Superintendent

June 1, 2016

Dear Head of School XXXX,

As you may know I am a graduate student in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program and am now embarking on the dissertation phase of this degree. My research focus is centered around males and reading in the elementary years. My study title is *Reading pedagogy that can engage all the students: Even the boys!* Specifically the purpose of this study is to explore how teachers who are involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practices understand/believe about this experience for young male students.

As you are aware the school is moving forward purposefully with readers workshop in grades one and three with the remaining elementary grades following this path in January 2017. I am looking for your permission to contact teachers from grade one and three to be possible participants in this study as I believe they will be able to share informative insights on how young male students are experiencing reading in school. My goal is to have between five and eight teachers who are willing to participate in the study. After receiving your permission I would contact teachers via email. Interviews with those individuals would take place through the summer of 2016 and into the early fall of 2016 at a time and place convenient to each participant. These interviews will in no way interrupt the education of your students. I plan on sharing the results of the study with the teachers, principal and yourself.

If you have questions or concerns regarding my study, please contact me at Dunn.lo@husky.neu.edu. If you are willing for teachers in your school to participate in my study, please indicate by signing below or you can write a letter of support for me. For your convenience, you may email a scanned copy to the email address above.

Yours truly,
Louise Dunn

I give my permission for Louise Dunn to conduct interviews with teachers in my school for the purpose of her study on the perceptions of classroom teachers as they work with young male readers to better understand what practices might motivate boys to engage with reading. .

________________________________________________ ___________________
Signature Date
Appendix B

Recruiting Letter to participants – initial email

Dear XXXXXX,

As you may know I am a graduate student in the college of professional studies at Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts and I am writing to ask your help in my current research. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

The purpose of this study is to explore how and what teachers who are involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practices understand/believe about this experience for young male students.

I have a strong research interest in the development of best pedagogical practices that can impact the engagement of young males in the reading process. I am currently working on my dissertation on how to facilitate reading pedagogy that can engage all the students: even the boys.

If you are interested in participating in this study I will be interviewing you about your perceptions of boys experiences in classrooms where reading pedagogy is conducted through a writers workshop model. Please be aware that there is no monetary compensation for being involved in this project, except for a purchase of a coffee at the time of the interviews. The interviews I will conduct as part of this research project will be undertaken following detailed protocols outlined by the university, which give the interviewee the right to withdraw at any time and to remain anonymous. There will be three interviews in total, which will be approximately 45 – 60 minutes in length. All the interviews will be taped using an audio app on an I Phone. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Participation is entirely voluntary

If you would like to participate please contact me by phone on 050 341 7053, or by email at Dunn.lo@husky.neu.edu. I will then share more details about the study and send you the consent to participate form.

Yours truly,

Louise Dunn
Follow up Email to Potential Participants

Dear XXXX,

Thank you for you willingness to be part of this project. I have attached with this email a copy of the Consent to Participate Form for your perusal prior to our first meeting. You and I will both sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records. I would just like to reconfirm with you that the interviews I will conduct as part of this research project will be undertaken following detailed protocols outlined by the university, which give the interviewee the right to withdraw at any time and to remain anonymous. As part of the process of keeping your responses confidential I would ask that you provide a pseudonym for yourself so that I can start the process of keeping all correspondence confidential.

I would like to visit you sometime at school to touch base so that if you have any questions about this process you can ask them before we proceed. Also this short visit will be an opportunity to consider possible times and dates for meeting for our first interview.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this process.

Yours truly,

Louise Dunn

050 341 7053 or Dunn.lo@husky.neu.edu
Appendix D

Consent to Participate Form

Northeastern University, Department
Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed
Student Researcher: Louise Dunn
Title of Project: Reading Pedagogy that can Engage all the Students: Even the Boys!

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to take part in a research study because you are a teacher working with grade one or three students who are involved in a change of reading pedagogy at your school.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers who are involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practice understand/believe about this experience for young male students?

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to be interviewed on three occasions. The interviews will include questions about your previous experiences of reading instruction with young males and your perceptions on the shift to a reader’s workshop model of pedagogy and how this is received by young male students.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed three times at a time and place that is convenient for you. These interviews will take about 45 – 60 minutes to complete.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort for participating in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?


There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help those who make decisions on school policy and vision be better informed on how to assist male readers.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

You may withdraw at any time.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Louise Dunn at 050 341 7053/ dunn.lo@husky.neu.edu the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact the Principal Investigator. Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed k.reissmedwed@neu.edu

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu You may call anonymously if you wish.
Will I be paid for my participation?

There is no payment for participation.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There will be no costs to participate.

Is there anything else I need to know?

All participants will be teachers with a minimum of three years experience.

I agree to take part in this research.

________________________
Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part

________________________
Printed name of person above

________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the
participant above and obtained consent

________________________
Printed name of person above

Depending upon the nature of your research, you may also be required to provide
information about one or more of the following if it is applicable:
1. A statement that the particular treatment or procedure may involve risks to the subject (or to
   the embryo or fetus, if the subject is or may become pregnant) which are currently
   unforeseeable.
2. Anticipated circumstances under which the subject’s participation may be terminated by the
   investigator without regard to the subject’s consent.
3. Any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.
4. The consequences of a subject’s decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for
   orderly termination of participation by the subject.
5. A statement that significant new finding(s) developed during the course of the research
   which may be related to the subject’s willingness to continue participation will be provided
   to the subject.
6. The approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Institution: ______________________________________________________
Participant (Pseudonym) ______________________________________
Interviewer: _____________________________________________________
Date: _____________________________________
Location of Interview: ________________________________

Interview: Reading Pedagogy that can Engage all the Students: Even the Boys!

Research question: How do teachers who are involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practices understand believe this experience for young male students?

Introduction:
• First, I want to thank you for your time and your willingness to participate in this interview. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University and this interview is part of my dissertation research. Before we proceed I will ask you to sign the Consent to anticipate form that I shared with you previously.

• You have been selected to speak with us today because you were identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the teaching, learning, and assessment of reading in the lower grades on this campus. This study does not aim to evaluate your teaching techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about teaching and learning around reading, and your perceptions about practices that help improve learning for young boys on this campus.

• Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

• I can assure you that all responses will remain confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the recordings,
which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. All of this is explained in the Consent to participate form, which I asked you to sign for our human subjects requirements of our university. To briefly summarize what is in this document, it states that: (a) all information will be held confidential, (b) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (c) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form?

• We have planned this interview to last about 45 minutes to one hour. If, at any time, you’re uncomfortable with a question or need me to re-phrase, please feel free to let me know. Do you have any questions at this time?

Interview Questions:

• How long have you been at this school and how long have you been teaching?

• Could you describe your role as it relates to student learning?

• What have been your prior experiences with reading instruction?

(Probe: Why was it successful? Why was it not?)

• How would you describe male students’ response to that method of instruction?

• What motivates you to embrace innovative teaching and learning strategies in your teaching?

(Probe: is it working why or why not?)

• What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and learning techniques?

(Probe: what might you consider could be added or removed from this inventory?)

• What is changing about the teaching of reading on this campus?

(Probe: how do you know?)
Thank you for your participation today and for being willing to answer my questions. I will be reviewing our interview and will be touch to arrange our next interview in the next couple of days. If I have any follow-up questions or need clarification, I will be in touch. Likewise, if any questions or concerns arise after our meeting today, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Again, thank you for your participation.

Notes:
Appendix F

Study Questions

Central question

How do teachers who are involved in a purposeful shift in reading pedagogical practices understand and believe about this experience for young male students?

Sub question

• What are the experiences of teachers who teach male students through a readers workshop model?

Interview questions

• What do you understand/believe to be the benefits and drawbacks of the change in reading instruction at your campus?
  (Probe: can you elaborate on why you think this?)
  • Do you feel prepared to deliver reading instruction through a readers workshop model?
    (Probe: why or why not?)
    • What does this change in pedagogical practice mean to you the teacher?
    • What has been your experience with male students in relationship to reading engagement?
      (Probe: was that experience at this school or at other campuses?)
      • How would you describe male student attitudes to reading experiences at school before this change in instructional practice?
      • What do you understand about male student attitudes to reading at school currently?
        (Probe: if it has changed either for the positive or negative please elaborate).
• Do you believe that there are any differences in attitudes between the genders towards reading in school?
• Do you believe that there are any frustrations on the part of male students in relationship to reading engagement in your classroom?
• Do you believe that there is any more enthusiasm or resistance to reading from male students since this shift in reading instruction?
• Do you have any extrinsically motivating concepts in your class to engage students in reading?
  (Probe: Are these successful or not?)
  • What features of readers workshop do you believe has the most/least impact on your young male readers?
  (Probe: How might the school facilitate or remediate this?)
  • How might you describe the sense of community within your classroom during reading instruction?
  (Probe: Has this sense of community increased or diminished during the shift in reading instruction?)
  • How might male students in your understanding be better served within reading classrooms?
  (Probe: is this happening anywhere on this campus?)
  • Are there any other observations, comments, or questions that you have?

Thank you for your participation today and for being willing to answer my questions. I will be reviewing our interview and if I have any follow-up questions or need clarification, I will be in touch. Likewise, if any questions or concerns arise after our meeting today, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you for your participation.