**Title: Exploring the Meaning of Reading Among Highly Motivated Children**

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## Introduction

Some children can read well and choose not to read.  Some children struggle with the skills to be efficient in reading and yet choose to read often. These experiences are common across children of any gender, ethnicity, and age. This paradox has resulted in the need to study reasons besides ability that may impact children's desire to read, leading to the birth of studies related to factors such as attitude and motivation. How children perceive themselves as readers and the extent that they read and enjoy reading is a dynamic, complex and ongoing process that is influenced by many factors and thus is difficult to gauge (Henk, McKenna, & Conraid, 2011, as cited in Henk, Marinka, & Melnick, 2012).  Some influential factors include past reading experiences, reading ability, levels of motivation, and social influences from family, peers, and teachers.  Children's motivation to read is closely linked with their attitudes toward reading. McKenna and Kear (1990) and others (e.g., Alexander & Filler, 1976; Cooter & Alexander, 1984) found that children's attitudes to read impacted their motivation to read.  More recent research has focused on children's reading attitudes and how their attitudes toward reading impact their reading self concept and performance (Park, 2011; Worrell, Roth, & Gabelko, 2007), which is closely tied to reading proficiency.

Reading proficiency has been documented as a link to success in all subject areas of formal education, for generally most children who are proficient in reading are likely to be proficient in other academic areas (Martens, 2007; Melekoglu, 2011). Most children have developed perceptions and personal beliefs about reading and writing, and they possess personal views related to seeing themselves as readers and writers by the time they enter formal schooling (Heath, 1983, as cited in Martens, 2007, p. 49). Research has shown that children's evolving perceptions and personal beliefs toward reading may have a direct positive impact on their academic achievement when coupled with effective literacy instruction (Cambourne, 2002; McCarthy, 2002; Young & Beach, 1997).  In order for educators to meet the academic needs of all children, they need to listen to their voices.  Listening to them may help

educators and researchers gain a better understanding of their academic and emotional needs, which may begin with understanding their reading perceptions.

Research has linked reading proficiency in the early grades as a "strong predictor" of academic achievement in later grades, including upper grades and post-secondary education (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Kazdan, 1999, as cited in Melekoglu, 2011, p. 248. Buly (2005) points out the skills needed in order to be proficient in reading include phonological awareness, word identification, ample reading fluency, understanding word meaning, and comprehension.  Law (2008) brings motivation into the mix in his study of the relationship between reading proficiency, home literacy practices, and motivation among Chinese children.  He found that reading proficiency is increased as a result of children's motivation to read and children's reading motivation thrives in home environments where literacy is practiced and valued. Although research has documented positive reading attitudes in most elementary aged children, regardless of proficiency,  this attitude begins a steady decline beginning at upper elementary through adolescence (Kush & Watkins, 1996; Ley, Schaer, & Dismukes, 1994; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995).

The decline in reading attitudes has perplexed educators and researchers.  It has been documented in the literature, mostly through quantitative surveys, that certain factors influence children's reading attitudes, including family environment (Clark, Osborne, & Akerman, 2008), reading achievement, and choice in reading materials (McKool, 2007), but children's individual voices related to their personal experiences and views toward their values, perceptions, and beliefs about reading is lacking in the literature. In essence, what is lacking in the research is the study of what reading means to children in the elementary grades who exhibit a high positive reading self-perception and attitude and the extent to which they read and enjoy reading. Perhaps listening to children's voices regarding the factors influencing their positive reading attitudes will help educators have a better insight into this phenomenon. Studying children who are highly motivated to read may give educators an inside view of their affective

domain, possibly leading to focused instructional strategies to help promote the same attitudes and motivation in children who are not as motivated toward academics and reading.  This article reports on one such study which leads to a dynamic description of what reading means to them, giving important implications for educators and future researchers.  The findings shed light on the affective domain of these readers, allowing instructional implications applicable to possibly increase reading motivation in all readers.

In a recent study on levels of reading motivation among proficient and struggling readers, McGeown, Norgate, and Warhurst (2012) conclude that the known relationship between reading skill and motivation is not as clear as commonly thought and therefore suggest more research needs to be conducted in this area.  This current study adds to this documented need to study children who are highly motivated to read by looking at factors that play a role in their motivation, giving educators an inside view at what makes them tick. Studying how highly motivated children perceive reading may be extremely beneficial to educators, administrators, parents, policy makers, curriculum leaders, and researchers. This study lays the groundwork for future studies to build upon by further exploring how these factors may impact academic achievement.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe the reading perceptions and reading attitudes of highly motivated children in a rural elementary school by examining the research questions with a focus on motivated readers' personal meanings of reading and the extent to which they read and enjoy reading.  This study explored the various factors that play a role in their reading attitudes, including how other factors such as relationships with family, peers, and educators, if applicable, possibly influence their self perceptions as readers and attitudes toward reading. In addition, the study will describe the role of other factors that impact their perceptions and attitudes toward reading.

The overarching question that served as a guide to the study was:

What is the meaning of reading to children who are highly motivated to read?

Sub questions that focused the study were:

1. To what extent do children who exhibit a positive reading attitude read?

2. To what extent do children who exhibit a positive reading attitude enjoy reading?

3. To what extent do other factors, such as relationships with family influence children's perceptions of themselves as readers?

4. What other factors, if any, play a role in children's perceptions of themselves as readers?

## Methodology

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), qualitative research is "suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants" (p. 8). In order to study highly motivated children's reading perceptions from their own words in their own social settings, a qualitative approach was applied. Hays' (2004) approach to research questions in a case study allows the researcher to ask a few bounded questions to help focus the study that evolves (p. 227). The questions act as a guide to keep the researcher from veering away from the case or topic being studied, which is a serious problem in case study research (p. 226). Creswell (2007) approaches research questions in a case study as focusing on a main central question and several guiding sub questions (p. 113). The study employed the methods of a case study approach to qualitative inquiry with multiple participants, and the case being studied was children's perceptions of reading. Yin (1994) proposes that case study research is preferred when exploring "how" or "why" questions, when the researcher has little control over what is being studied, and the phenomenon being studied is situated in a "real-life" contemporary context (p. 1). Barone (2004) details how case studies have been effectively utilized across various disciplines and provides histories of multiple studies that successfully employ the approach in literacy research. Employing a case study approach for this study was aimed at understanding how children who are highly motivated to

read perceive reading and helped answer the research question as to what reading means to them.

Schiefele, Schaffner, Moller, and Wigfield (2012) point out that very few attempts to measure reading motivation through a qualitative means exist, for most studies focus on quantitative surveys. This study measured reading motivation with one such survey but also contributed data in the form of qualitative conversations with children. The researcher gained deep insights by exploring the factors that influence the participants' perceptions and values. This insight was informed by multiple pieces of data from multiple sources. Data were triangulated to produce a fully rounded study by utilizing cross validation across all data sources. The sources of data included the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP), individual interviews, participants' reading journals, and a reading log. This instrument will be further explained in a later section of this article.

### Selection of Participants

All fifth grade students at the research site (n= 85), a small, rural elementary school in the Midwest, were invited to participate in this study. Nineteen students agreed and were administered the MRP survey. Participants were selected from all fifth grade students in order to include all potential participants who exhibit high motivation levels toward reading. Students who exhibit high motivation levels are not limited to demographics, gender, and/or academic aptitude, so no limitations were employed on who may potentially participate in this study. Participants were selected from the fifth grade in order to gather participants who have developed individual opinions and views of reading, for this is generally the age at which children have begun to develop their own perceptions, according to Chapman and Tunmer (2003), and can express those perceptions with general ease.

Although the goal of case study research is not to generalize among populations (Creswell, 2007; Hays, 2004; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 1994), the researcher employed sampling procedures to gather a representative sample that "shows the quality of the whole" (Thomas,

2011, p. 62) and provides "an information-rich" case (Patton, 1990, as cited in Barone, 2004, p. 22). Criterion sampling was utilized to assure the participants shared the criteria of exhibiting high motivation to read (Creswell, 2007; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Criterion sampling was used to select from participants that scored a reading motivation level between 59 and 80 on the MRP to continue on in the study and participate with the rest of the data collection. This ensured that the participants were highly motivated in regard to reading and should provide "information-rich" data for analysis.

Creswell (2007) recommends including only four or five participants in a case study; however, the researcher wanted to select more participants in order to gain a more accurate and in-depth picture of what reading means to children who exhibit high motivation levels toward reading. Participants were purposefully selected according to their numerical motivation scores, which was determined by following the scoring guide included with the survey instrument. The number of students who met the criteria for the study included three males and four females and their full raw scores ranged from 59 to 77. This is shown in Table 1.

## Data Collection

Data collection in a case study varies in procedures as the researcher "builds an in-depth picture of the case" (Creswell, 2007, p. 132). In following Stake's (1995) approach to data collection, as outlined in Creswell (2007) and others, the researcher collected extensive data from multiple sources in order to gather data to answer the research questions, including survey data from the *MRP*, participants' individual interviews, narrative data from participants' reading journal, and information gathered from participants' reading logs.

**Motivation to Read Profile**

The MRP is a survey instrument from the Public Domain and was created by Gambrell, et al., (1996) to help educators understand multiple dimensions of children's reading perceptions. It uses a survey approach of 20 multiple choice questions with answer choices based on a four point Likert scale that determine children's self-concept as readers (10

questions) and their value of reading (10 questions). The scoring guide provided with the profile was used to determine a numeric reading motivation score for each student by adding the scores of the two categories. Sample questions include "When I am in a group talking about stories, I a) almost never talk about my ideas, b)sometimes talk about my ideas, c) almost always talk about my ideas, or d) always talk about my ideas" (p. 26) and "When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel a) very happy, b) sort of happy, c) sort of unhappy, or d) unhappy" (p. 27). The MRP has been evaluated for internal consistency and exhibits moderately high reliability for both subscales of self concept and reading value (Gambrell, et al., 1996).

**Individual Interviews**

Each participant was individually interviewed once using a semi-structured interview. deMarrais (2004) defines qualitative interviews as a method of gathering data from participants using "focused conversations" (p. 52). The questions were semi-structured, which allowed the researcher to utilize probes, or follow-up questions, as needed. According to Creswell (2007), the most important part of conducting an interview is to be a good listener and not a frequent speaker. The researcher took great care to remember this during the interviews to stay focused on listening rather than writing. The interview questions were designed to provide data to help answer all five research questions. Sample interview questions included "What do your family members think about your reading habits?" and "Do you think you are a good reader? Why or why not?" Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed for accuracy and ease of analysis, resulting in 46 pages of transcribed data.

**Reading Journals**

Narrative data were collected in the format of the participants' reading journals. At the conclusion of each interview, each child was instructed to record entries into a reading journal three times throughout the data collection process by answering very specific prompts related to the process of reading a book of their choice from either their home or school library. The journal entries were to be completed before, during, and after they read the books. The journal

followed the format of open-ended responses based on their recreational reading choices. The children's entries served as an insight into their value and use of reading as a recreational tool, which aided in understanding and developing children's reading perceptions. This data helped answer research questions related to the extent that children who exhibit high motivation levels toward reading read and enjoy reading and writing about it.

**Individual Reading Log**

In order to get a clear picture of the extent of the participants' reading habits and experiences, they were provided with an option to keep a written reading log for one week.  At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher instructed them individually about how to record entries into the reading log.  It was explained to them that they did not need to read anything extra, but instead to record everything they read or reading experiences they participated in throughout the week, focusing on their own natural process of reading experiences.  The reading log provided a space to mark whether each reading experience took place at home or school, was required by their teacher or self-initiated, and whether the reading material was fiction or non-fiction.  They also recorded the time spent reading for each entry.

<center>**Data Analysis**</center>

**Initial Analysis of the MRP**

The first section of the *Motivation to Read Profile* (MRP) was administered to all fifth grade students at the research site who returned their signed consent and assent forms (n=19). The highest possible score on the survey is 80, which is achieved if students choose the most positive response for each question.  Each survey receives two scores, one for *Self-Concept as a Reader* and one for *Value of Reading.* There are ten questions for each of the two categories. These scores were initially used to help determine the research sample of participants, but later when the researcher conducted a cross-participant analysis among each participant and revisited these scores to provide more depth to the analysis and provide a clearer picture of the participants' reading perceptions by providing cross-validation between their survey responses

<center>9</center>

and the data collected from interviews, reading journals, and/or reading logs. See Table 1 for details on each participants' scores.

**Coding of Data & Thematic Analysis**

As Merriam (1988) stated that "there is no standard format for reporting case study research" (p. 193, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 195), the "overall intent" of the studybecame the guide into how to analyze and report the study (p. 195). Since this case study focused on what reading means to children who exhibit high levels of reading motivation with the case being studied as the meaning of reading rather than the individual participants, the approach needed to focus on the description of the case through the eyes of multiple participants. Stake (1995) points out that good case study research needs to adequately define the case within a story format (p. 131). In order to build the story, the researcher looked at the participants' experiences and views through a qualitative lens. This allowed the employment of the steps for analyzing qualitative research as outlined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008).

By looking closely at the data through the lenses of the big ideas, or themes, categories within the data began to emerge based on the research questions. The categories further divided the big ideas into more manageable sections. Therefore, in beginning Bloomberg and Volpe's second stage of analysis, categories were marked, organized, and sorted by assigning them codes, or short abbreviated terms, to ease the marking. The purpose of dissecting the data by categorizing them into smaller sections was to keep the vast amount of data manageable in order to not "drown in it" (p. 101). The codes that were marked were relevant to the study and helped answer the research questions. Before the coded data made much sense, the researcher needed to sort the codes and place them within their specific categories by physically cutting apart the marked sections of the data, or the paragraphs and/or lines that contain the codes, and place them in groups by like category. Each group was placed in a separate, labeled envelope. In order to let the themes give "control and order" to the study, as van Manen (1990, p. 79) described as imperative for research to have meaning, the researcher

let the emerging categories inform interpretation.  This allowed patterns and themes to emerge or "cut through the data" as Merriam (1998, p. 11) points out.  The themes emerged from the data, rather than selecting themes and then searching for supporting data.

In order to effectively identify the big ideas, or themes, the researcher followed van Manen's (1990) selective highlighting approach through reading the data and highlighting what stood out in regard to each emerging theme.  The researcher let the data speak as she focused on selected pieces that contained evidence of the meaning of reading to highly motivated children. She looked for any phrases that stood out, which was an important step of this approach (p. 94).  The coded data were read and reread, while highlighting phrases until no new themes emerged.  Themes found in the data included reading activities and the purposes of each, readers' self-perceptions, and the outside influences of family, friends, teachers, and technology.

## Limitations of the Study

This study sought to understand children's reading perceptions in a case study format that allowed for rich description and valuable insight into individual children's ideas and views. In order to allow for the rich detail needed, this study employed a small number of participants, which is a limitation of the study.  Another limitation of the study is related to the limits of the ability to determine participants who are highly motivated, for this is based on the *Motivation to Read Profile*, which has been deemed as a sound research instrument to measure reading motivation; however, participants' individual responses indicate their level of motivation.  It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the accuracy of their perceptions of the questions, which may skew the results of their profile score, possibly resulting in a limiting factor in this study. Perhaps asking their teachers to select students who are most motivated to read on their own and comparing this list to students who scored high on the survey and identified as highly motivated would add another level of triangulation and possibly counteract this limitation.

As stated earlier in this article, much of the literature research indicate that high motivation to read is linked with strong reading abilities.  Since this study does not connect the motivated participants to academic achievement or reading ability, it is possible that some children who regard themselves as highly motivated to read may not fit the profile of high motivation being linked with strong reading abilities.  This may result in a limitation of this study. A final data related limitation stems from the small number of reading journals returned for analysis.  Although all participants indicated they would complete the reading journals as they read a book of their choice, only four participants completed them.

The researcher's positionality within the research site may have implications in the outcomes of this study.  As the former Library Media Specialist at the research site, some of the participants may remember the researcher and associate her as an educator who encouraged them to read.  This relationship she had with them may have led to skewed results if they answered interview questions and/or survey questions in the way they think she wanted them to answer.  To address this, the researcher explained to them the purpose of the research and how she values and wantsto know what they think.  It was underscored that everyone's answers are unique and important, stressing honesty no matter what their views are in relation to reading and how they feel about reading.

The researcher addressed this area of concern by being fully aware of her positionality in the study, especially in the analysis and interpretation of the data.  Lisa Cary (2007), in quoting Marcus and Fischer, reminds researchers of the power they have in regard to interpreting the data in qualitative studies by recognizing that our "representations are interpretations" rather than "mirror images" (p. 52).  This reminded the researcher to view the participants and the data as individual pieces of the study's puzzle, while not neglecting the individual voice that is imperative in qualitative research.

**Findings**

Data analysis led to five major findings. These findings focused on reading activities within the extent that participants' read, factors that influence their self-perception as readers, family or relationship influences that impact their self-perception as readers, and the purpose of the participants' reading with the extent that they enjoy reading. These four findings contributed to the fifth and final finding to help answer the overarching research question *What is the meaning of reading to children who are highly motivated to read?* The findings that emerged from this study were:

1. Children in this study who exhibited a positive reading attitude read widely and extensively with varying reading activities and preferences.

2. Children in this study who exhibited a positive reading attitude enjoy reading but that enjoyment was impacted by their individual purposes for reading. These purposes include the various aspects of aesthetic reading and efferent reading and encompass the means of reading to reach personal goals and explore interests.

3, Other factors influenced children's perceptions of themselves as readers, including influences from family, friends, and teachers; however, the level and extent of each influence varied among the participants. Family is generally more influential, followed by teachers, and then finally friends.

4. Other factors that played a role in children's perceptions of themselves as readers included their positive and negative feelings toward the act of reading, their reading grades, their ability to interact with literature as critical thinkers, their varying vocabulary and reading levels, and the use of digital technologies.

5. The meaning of reading to the children in this study who were highly motivated to read was multifaceted centered around the purposes of reading, including reading for the pure enjoyment of it, reading for information, reading to fulfill outside requirements,

reading to impress others, and reading for internal gratification.  Furthermore, reading is

a pleasurable and personal experience through exploration of known and unknown

settings across genres, or categories, of literature. Reading opens the door to

knowledge, creating a space to learn about things of interest and useful facts to help

guide future learning and experiences. Reading involves serving the reader with fulfilling

various purposes that are motivated by both intrinsic desires and extrinsic needs, with a

higher concentration of intrinsic desires than extrinsic needs.

## Discussion of Findings

Digging into highly motivated children's perceptions of and attitudes toward reading was

a fulfilling journey, made complete with answers to the research questions leading to important

implications for families, educators, and researchers.   This section begins with a discussion of

the five major findings which provided answers to the research questions.  Included herein are

interpretations of how each of these findings contribute to the overall meaning of this study.

Researcher interpretations were guided by a thorough search for meaning from all of the

findings.  Great care was employed to maintain consistency among the findings, interpretations,

and conclusions and provided a Consistency Chart (see Table 2) to allow ease in following the

researcher's thought processes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

## Extent of Reading and Reading Enjoyment

Research has found that children who are motivated to read will read more often than

children who are unmotivated in the task of reading (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999;

Melekoglu, 2011; Watkins & Coffey, 2004).  Many studies focus on reading motivation and

gender (McGeown, Goodwin, Henderson, & Wright, 2011) or comparisons of reading based on

gender (Bettis & Roe, 2008; Love & Hamston, 2003).  Furthermore, several studies have

focused on children who have a low reading self-perception and low motivation toward reading

(Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2000).  Fewer studies focus on the extent that avid readers

like to read and enjoy reading, especially the extent that highly motivated readers read.  This

study looked at the extent that these children read and enjoy reading, providing a voice to them that did not place limitations on the focus as previous studies have done (i.e., gender, genre, ability, format).  The children were allowed to tell their stories through multiple data sources, including open-ended interview questions that used a protocol with the freedom to add follow-up or clarifying questions as needed and through their reading journals which allowed them to respond to open-ended questions related to books they were reading.

Through a thorough literature review of both qualitative and quantitative research measures that focused on reading motivation as it related to reading behavior, Schiefele et al., (2012) determined that the extent of children's enjoyment of reading activities is related to motivation. Lepper and Henderlong (2000) also found this to be true in various academic venues including reading, but they determined in their review of related literature that extrinsic and intrinsic motivation is in a complex relationship that works together to impact behavior.  This was found to be the case in this study as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation played a role in the various reading activities the children enjoyed.  When the participants were motivated to read, no matter the purpose, their behavior led them to read.

In a study of the contribution of reading motivation to reading amount, Guthrie et al. (1999) also found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation played a vital role in the amount the children read; however, because of the nature of the simultaneous category in the regression model, they were unable to determine if the motivation factors uniquely contributed to reading amount.  Since this study focused on qualitative methodology, the participants' experiences added depth to their finding and supplied evidence of the unique level of involvement of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the relationship each had with the children's amount of reading.   Intrinsic motivation was involved through the participants' enjoyment of the act of reading.  This was shown in the finding in which all participants demonstrated in their interviews that they like reading for the pure enjoyment of it.  Jason stated that he found reading to be a fun way to spend his time (intrinsic motivation) and this was corroborated by the amount of

reading he participated in as evidenced in his reading log.  He filled the reading log completely (11 entries) with just recording three days of reading activities.  Further evidence of this was found in the themes *self-perception as readers* and the *purpose of reading* as participants expressed that reading made them feel internal gratification and served their immediate and future needs.  This leads the researcher to believe that the children in my study saw the value of spending time to read and therefore made the effort to read.

Extrinsic motivation was also involved through the participants' enjoyment of reading and was related to their reading amount.  This was found within the theme *outside influences.* Three participants expressed the desire to read to earn Accelerated Reader (AR) points to impress themselves and possibly others (AR is a software program designed to allow students to take quizzes on books read to earn points).  This was corroborated through Andrea's amount of reading recorded in her reading log.  She entered the most entries of all participants (36 books) and expressed she was reading to earn AR points before the approaching deadline, yet she stated in her interview that she does not read merely to earn AR points. Extrinsic motivation was also hinted at in three participants' interviews as they expressed gratification of reading many books or reading for long periods of time which resulted in impressing others.

This study filled a need determined by Yaacov Petscher (2010) who, in his meta-analysis study of the relationship between reading attitudes and reading achievement, found that more research is needed to explore how closely reading attitudes and reading behavior are related.  Petscher (2010) documented this need for additional research when reviewing a 1982 study of attitudes by Rajecki.  Rajecki believed that attitudes and reading behavior were related but the extent of this relation needed to be clarified.   The limited scope of this current study, with a limited number of participants, does not clarify the extent of this relationship but it does add to the conversation by showing the extent that the highly motivated readers in this study display positive reading attitudes and read often.  This study corroborated these previous studies by hinting at a relationship between reading motivation and reading behavior. The rich

description of the participants' stories allows for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This description allows readers to decide if this context may transfer to another context, adding to the trustworthiness of the study.

This case study also found that children who are highly motivated to read demonstrate they read for various purposes, including reading to learn more about topics of interest which is related to efferent reading. This is interesting in light of a quantitative study of secondary students in Germany focused on determining if students' preferences for aesthetic or efferent texts were associated with reading motivation (Moller and Retelsdorf, 2008, as cited in Schiefele, et al., 2012, p. 449). They concluded that factors contributing to students' preferences for choosing to read were only related to efferent and aesthetic reading, not related to self-concept or competition. By including this study's participants' score of self-concept as determined on the MRP survey, another level was added to the conversation. Factors contributing to the participants' preferences for choosing to read were also related to efferent and aesthetic reading choices and may include self-concept since the participants all exhibit a strong self-concept in reading. More research is needed to determine the differences among these studies, especially since this study has a small number of participants, but some implications for educators exist. These will be discussed in a later section of this article.

### Relationship Influences on Reading Perceptions

Children in this study who were encouraged to read in their home environments were more motivated to read. Most encouragement in their home environment comes from family members, such as parents, guardians, siblings, grandparents, etc. This study focused on exploring the extent that the family relationships in the participants' homes and other social relationships influenced their self-perceptions as readers. Each participant reported in their interviews that someone in their family values reading and six participants remember reading with their family members as a young child, resulting in a positive influence on their perceptions as readers. Family involvement was important as they were learning to read. One example

Samuel provided in his interview showed motivation to read with parents. When he was very young, his dad read to him stories from a series that he learned to love and he became "fascinated by the stories." Family support is important now as they are reading to learn and reading for pleasure. Another example comes from Samuel. He described events in his interview that show how his mom values the extent that he reads, and because of his past experiences with reading he now reads to his little brother, continuing the literacy cycle in the home. This leads the researcher to suggest that the level of family involvement may correspond to the level of the participants' overall reading success, but a direct relation is beyond the scope of this study.

The findings were similar to Greaney and Hegarty's (1987, as cited in Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997) study of fifth grade children's home environments and its relationship to their reading experiences and attitudes. Similar to this current study, they determined that children with positive attitudes toward reading participated in a greater amount of aesthetic reading at home than children who did not have a positive attitude toward reading. By allowing the participants to discuss any type of reading, findings emerged that demonstrated both aesthetic and efferent reading at home were encouraged by family members. This was evidenced through four participants' reading logs (the other three participants did not return their logs, adding to the limitations of this study). The combined time they spent reading was 42 hours in one week with 57 separate reading entries. Of all the entries, 53 items were not required by their teachers and included both fiction (47 items) and nonfiction (10 items), representing both aesthetic reading and efferent reading.

Past and present reading experiences with various family members were mentioned more often than experiences with friends or teachers, leading to the conclusion that family seems to have more influence on these children's perceptions as readers. Some children in this study value teacher and peer praise more than others, so it does not seem that being highly motivated to read is a factor that plays in to the desire to please or impress others. However,

that is beyond the scope of this study.  Nevertheless, teachers and peers played an important role in the participants' perceptions of themselves as readers.  This study agreed with the current literature that concludes that sharing books between peers and exposure to books from teachers both play important roles in children's reading perceptions (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; McKool, 2007).  However, it provided a unique perspective in teachers' influences by also concluding that teachers' positive expressions toward the amount and extent of my participants' reading activities helped the children feel better about themselves as readers.  Six participants provided evidence in their interviews that their teachers believe they are good readers which made them feel good about themselves as readers.  Four participants reported their teachers appear proud of their ability to demonstrate a positive reading role model and two participants mentioned their teachers are proud of their reading grades.

Friendship or peer influences on children's self perceptions as readers took an unexpected turn.  The researcher expected the participants to be influenced by their friends' thoughts about reading and their reading choices, which was not evident in the findings. Rather, the seven participants stated that what their friends think about their reading ability and choices does not impact their own reading choices or their self perceptions.  All the children reported they enjoyed sharing books with their friends (MRP Question 6) and two children reported that they enjoyed mentoring or helping their friends become better readers (interview). It seems that the children in this study have a positive influence on their peers who do not read as often.  Perhaps exploring this area with older children in the middle grades might have varied results more to what was expected, possibly showing that highly motivated readers' peers may influence what they choose to read and how often they read.

### Other Influences on Reading Perceptions

Findings are related to the current literature that shows children who read often have an increased vocabulary (McKenna, et al., 2012).  This study did not focus on quantitative measures of vocabulary levels but rather focused on the children's own perceptions regarding

their reading achievement and attitudes. Vocabulary was a construct that emerged from three participants' interview data which demonstrated their focus on reading as it helped increase their vocabulary levels and reading levels.  This was corroborated by their MRP data.  Six participants reported they can almost always figure out unknown words and one participant can sometimes figure out unknown words (MRP Question 5).  This provided a unique insight into the value they placed on reading, showing they may have understood the benefits of reading as possibly increasing their academic skills.

Digital technologies and the format of reading material also emerged as an important factor that influenced children's reading experiences and perceptions, but not to the extent that the researcher expected.  All but one participant stated in their interviews that they would rather read from a traditional print format than any form of digital technology.  Most participants expressed preference for reading traditional print books, while one participant explained how she preferred reading from the digital format. This finding was corroborated by their reading logs, showing only 3 reading experiences from a digital format out of 57 entries.  This was a surprising finding. Although the researcher expected and found each of them to be knowledgeable in the various digital literacy technologies, it was surprising to find the majority did not prefer reading in the digital format.  It seems that reading from the digital technologies, such as a Kindle, may not motivate them to read more.  They read in the format that serves their purpose at the time, such as the ability to adjust lighting on a Kindle if reading at night. Since the children in the study seem to value increasing their vocabulary through reading, it appears that they would value digital technology formats more if they understood that their use may increase vocabulary knowledge by making it easy to look up unknown words.  Another benefit would be the process of navigating the interactive nature of these technologies, resulting in the ease of exploring interests. It is possible that they associated technology use with instruction, adding to their minimal use with recreational reading.

In a recent survey study of reading attitudes of 5,080 middle school students, McKenna et al., (2012) found similar results in regard to reading attitudes toward digital formats. However, their study determined differences among academic and recreational reading with digital formats and reflected gender differences. They found that middle school females had a more positive attitude toward reading both academic and recreational books from a digital format than middle school males did. This was also true in this study of younger children, for the participant who enjoyed reading in a digital format was female. Because of the limited number of participants in this study, the researcher is not able to generalize this finding to a larger population as McKenna et al. (2012) did.

## The Meaning of Reading

Each of the research sub-questions provided evidence to help determine what reading means to the highly motivated children in this study. This description of the meaning of reading provides a glimpse into what makes highly motivated readers tick. The participants were unique, resulting in personal meanings of reading with small differences, but the general themes within the overall meaning were similar across the participants. These themes include the love of their favorite genres, relating to their favorite characters, being able to think critically about the story by making connections, and reading to learn. This study's purpose was to explore and describe their reading perceptions and determine what reading means to them. This exploration has resulted in only a glimpse into their reading perceptions. The uniqueness of each individual emerged and showcases how they viewed reading and how they viewed themselves as readers. More research is needed to determine if this meaning is generally true for all children who are highly motivated to read or if being highly motivated to read made their meanings unique.

The importance of intrinsic motivation on the extent of reading activities really came through in this study. While all children in this study understood the need to read for information and read to impress others at varying times, the draw of the stories fed them with more internal

desire to continue reading.  Most of their reading experiences focused on reading fiction stories for the sake of the enjoyment of the story.  The gratifying feeling of the act of reading was the desired outcome.  This led to the conclusion that fostering intrinsic motivation may be the key to increase motivation to read in children who may not value this gratification.  Such a task is not easy but this study underscores the need.

One of the reasons the researcher embarked on this study was to gain insight into highly motivated readers' affective domain.  For several years she have witnessed many children in her school library who were capable of reading and chose not to read.  She also witnessed many children who lacked sufficient skills to read yet enthusiastically embarked on the task often.  Many children  were motivated to read just for the extrinsic rewards they would receive, and conversely, it was also observed that many children would read often, making selective book choices and expressed immense enjoyment of the stories.  All of these children were motivated to read on varying levels and for various purposes, showing the complex nature of the act of reading.  This study has answered the research questions, but after reflecting on why she wanted to do this study, the researcher sees that it has only whet her appetite to keep exploring. The researcher hoped to understand the perplexing nature of children who exhibited high motivation toward reading.  She now sees that having knowledge of their perplexing nature and understanding it are not the same thing.  This study provides a basic understanding, but the deep understanding being searched for is still calling.  More research is needed to fully understand the dimensions of children's reading perceptions and the relationship between motivation and the choice to read.

The trend for calling for more research is a healthy task and not uncommon.  In a review of the reading motivation literature, Schiefele et al. (2012) concluded that more research is needed to help distinguish between reading for enjoyment and reading for school-related assignments.  In the attempt to describe the reading perceptions of highly motivated children, this current study focused on both types of reading mentioned by Schiefele and his colleagues.

By exploring what reading means to the participants, this study offers researchers, educators, and interested persons a deeper knowledge and basic understanding of the individual perspectives and the collective perspectives of the highly motivated readers in the study.

## Implications for Educators

By understanding what reading means to highly motivated children, educators may have a sharpened tool to more accurately diagnose, foster, and cultivate various reading behaviors and attitudes that have been perplexing educators for decades. This study provided educators an insider view of the reading perceptions of some children who are already motivated to read. More improved and focused instructional strategies to help promote the same attitudes and motivation in children who are not as motivated toward academics and reading could emerge from this study. Most educators are aware that motivated readers view reading as a pleasurable experience with increased academic (vocabulary) skills as a bonus of extensive reading rather than the reason to read. This leads educators to see the need to focus on reading pleasure with unmotivated readers, helping them to experience and value the act of reading, instead of trying to focus on building isolated skills needed to become better readers. Many educators focus on fiction reading to promote these pleasurable reading experiences with their unmotivated readers. This study demonstrates the participants' feelings of joy in reading nonfiction so promoting more nonfiction options in reading choices may serve to increase unmotivated readers' attitudes toward reading. This is further discussed in this section.

**Use of Measurement Tools**

Understanding the importance of improving children's attitudes toward reading should lead educators to explore factors that influence children's affect or emotions. This study underscores the importance and provides a solution. There are several tools available to teachers to study and measure their students' affective domain. Many of these tools are located in the public domain so ease of access and availability is not an issue. One tool is the MRP

used in my study.  If educators follow the instructions provided with the selected document and administer the MRP to their elementary students (or use the adapted version for adolescents), then they may have a clearer view of their own students' reading perceptions and attitudes. This would provide them with valuable information related to their own students' reading motivation level and self-perceptions of themselves as readers.  They would be able to apply instructional techniques geared to specifically address issues their own students reflect need of.

**Education Standards and a Revisit of the Increased Nonfiction Spotlight**

A recent issue perplexing educators is the recent adoption and, in some cases, rejection of the Common Core State Standards by many states.  The standards have led to updated experiences and assessments that call for students to read at higher textual complexities than ever before.   Crow (2007) pointed out that often these high-stakes assessments lead to instructional strategies that "create unmotivated learners" (p. 49).  This study showed the importance of both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation in the participants' value of and purposes for reading. Some instructional practices emphasize extrinsic rewards and ignore fostering intrinsic desires.  Both are needed to create motivated learners and this may apply to create motivated readers, as well.  If educators focus on ways to increase intrinsic motivation, then their students might be more successful in their extent and amount of reading activities. This may help with developing the critical thinking skills required for the new assessments.

Another important implication for educators to focus on is the increased spotlight on nonfiction informational text as outlined in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).  The participants in this study expressed the joy of reading nonfiction in their interviews, yet only ten nonfiction items were recorded in their reading logs.  Only four participants completed the reading log, so this is possibly why the nonfiction number is low; however, it is substantial when compared to the 57 overall entries including 47 fiction items. Perhaps another reason is that their teachers and/or parents may value fiction and encourage fiction reading more often than nonfiction.  Ed Spicer (2013) is a teacher and curriculum leader who addressed this issue.  He

believes the CCSS focus on increasing the percentage of nonfiction books children read as they progress through their schooling does not mean we need to focus on how many fiction books or nonfiction books the children read. Instead the focus needs to be on how educators teach with the books and how they model expository text strategies.  The researcher agrees with Spicer that children will benefit from and select more nonfiction materials to explore when they experience the reading of nonfiction text modeled effectively.  It cannot be concluded that the participants have not had the positive experiences Spicer mentions, but this current study points to the need to explore effective expository teaching strategies to promote more nonfiction informational texts. Some participants in this current study also value facts they learn from reading fiction books, leading to the importance to revisit the narrow emphasis CCSS places on nonfiction texts to teach facts.  Perhaps teachers may think nonfiction books are not as engaging as fiction, but today's attractive nonfiction design is appealing to young children so it warrants a revisit.

**School Librarians**

This study also has implications for educators serving as school librarians.  One of the main objectives of a strong library program is to foster the love of reading.  This is more easily accomplished in elementary libraries as children are learning to read.  This is more difficult for school librarians in the middle and high schools as students are now reading to learn.  The joy of reading can sometimes be overclouded by the need to read for information.  School librarians can take the knowledge grained from this study to show students and classroom teachers the need to provide ongoing opportunities for their students to read for pleasure and increase the opportunities for them to enjoy reading.  Hosting students in book clubs or book groups during the lunch break may be one way this can be accomplished.  Extending the library's hours to include before school or after school access may also encourage students to visit the library. Showcasing and promoting both fiction and nonfiction books as pleasurable reading choices

may increase students' awareness of various genres and reading choices, possibly leading to increased motivation to read.

## Implications for Families

This study showed the importance that each participant placed on early reading experiences with family members and the continuance of these reading experiences throughout their elementary years.  It is imperative that families continue to read with the children in their care in order to foster the affective domain of reading to improve reading attitudes and intrinsic motivation.  It cannot be determined from the scope of this study if children who are not motivated to read would have similar positive experiences or if their reading lives with their families were neglected which would possibly add to their low motivation to read.  However, this study shows the positive relationship between early and continued reading experiences with family and the positive influence it had on the participants; therefore, reading with family members is encouraged.

It is also important for families to note that positive comments, facial gestures and related body language were also important to highly motivated children, thus demonstrating the need to continue this behavior or begin it if it is currently neglected in families' homes.  This study shows that children who are highly motivated to read felt their reading lives were supported by their various family members, and their body language and wording from the data collected demonstrate the level of importance of this to the children.  An example of this was found in Samuel's interview as he explained his mom smiles at him as he reads and "it's her look" that shows him her approval of his reading activities.  Their reading lives were supported financially through purchasing of books and through opportunities for library visits.  An example of this was found in Samuel's and Serena's interviews.  Samuel spoke of the extensive amount of children's magazines his parents have subscribed to for him.  Serena spoke of the numerous books she has at home and how her mother and grandmother give her money to spend on books at the book fair each year. They were also supported psychologically through the various

gestures mentioned above.  These were important and should be goals of families to foster the reading lives of their children, which in turn may promote healthy intrinsic reading motivation thus possibly increase achievement in all academic areas (Melekoglu, 2011).

**Conclusions**

Continued investigations of children's reading attitudes and perceptions and the impact this has on their extent and enjoyment of reading is paramount for more detailed understanding. This current study has pointed to possible paths of this future research.  One such important consideration points to involving parents and teachers in future related studies.  This study focused solely on the children's voices, but it is clear from the findings that it would be useful to study their parents and how they view their child's reading lives to compare it to the child's perspective.  This may lead to a deeper understanding of the constructs related to their reading perceptions.  It would also be useful to study more experiences from school and to interview teachers to get a clearer picture of their perspectives in regard to teachers' expectations and instruction.  Also important is to explore how this relates to children's reading motivation and the impact it has on their perceptions of reading.

Another useful component to add to future research is to repeat this study with a larger number of highly motivated participants and bring in socioeconomic factors and gender factors to determine if there is a relationship between socioeconomic background, gender, and reading motivation. Repeating this study with children with low motivation may also provide insight to educators to see if there are any correlations or similarities among highly motivated and low motivated readers.  Reading achievement was not considered in this study, so looking at standardized test scores and quantitative measures to compare to the qualitative data among both low and high motivated students may be beneficial to educators.

Digital literacies are emerging and becoming more important in the academic and home lives of children.  This was a component that emerged from the data.  Perhaps purposefully adding this component to the repeated study may add to the growing body of research in this

area and find useful implications for educators to see how digital literacies impact the motivation

to read.  This study could be repeated with adolescents at the middle school age and the results

might be different.  Perhaps completing another study with the same constructs would be

interesting to see if or how the affective domain is impacted by age.  Also controlling for gender

and age might result in important implications for educators.  Regardless of the researchers'

paths and focus, the need for specific qualitative study that listens to these young readers'

voices has been demonstrated.

Table 1

**Table 1: Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) Results**

| Name | Self Concept as Readers | | Value of Reading | | Full Survey | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Raw Score/ 40 | % | Raw Score/ 40 | % | Raw Score/ 80 | % |
| Andrea | 33 | 83 | 34 | 85 | 67 | 80 |
| Cara | 39 | 98 | 36 | 90 | 75 | 94 |
| Jason | 39 | 98 | 38 | 95 | 77 | 96 |
| Jonathan | 30 | 75 | 29 | 68 | 59 | 74 |
| Rylee | 30 | 75 | 37 | 93 | 67 | 84 |
| Samuel | 35 | 88 | 38 | 95 | 73 | 91 |
| Serena | 35 | 88 | 36 | 90 | 71 | 89 |

Table 2

**Table 2: Consistency Chart of Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions**

| Findings | Interpretations | Conclusions |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Children in this study who exhibited a positive reading attitude read widely and extensively with varying reading activities and preferences. | -The children value the act of reading as worthwhile. <br>-When the children value something, they choose to spend time with it. <br>-Children with positive reading attitudes are intrinsically motivated to read which seems to be the driving force behind the amount of time they spend reading. | -When children see the value of spending time to read, then they will make the effort to read. <br>-Motivation plays a key role in determining the extent that these children read. |
| 2. Children in this study who exhibited a positive reading attitude enjoy reading but that enjoyment is impacted by their individual purposes for | -The children want to reach their personal goals (both present and future) and they see reading as a means to reach them. <br>-They see reading as a | -When the children in this study are motivated to read, no matter the purpose, their behavior leads them to read. <br>-Both intrinsic and extrinsic |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| reading. These purposes included the various aspects of aesthetic reading and efferent reading and encompass the means of reading to reach personal goals and explore interests. | pathway to learning. -They experience reading as pleasurable in itself. -Extrinsic motivating factors also lead them to enjoy reading and give them a purpose to read. | motivation plays a role, not just intrinsic motivation. |
| 3. Other factors influence the children's perceptions of themselves as readers, including influences from family, friends, and teachers; however, the level and extent of each influence varies among the participants. Family is generally more influential, followed by teachers, and then finally friends. | -The factors that influence the children in this study to read vary among the children, based on present situations, past experiences, and future goals. -Sharing reading experiences with family is important to the children in this study. Family involvement was important in the past as they were learning to read and is important now as they are reading to learn and reading for pleasure. -Reading to impress their teachers and friends is important. They value their teachers' praise and friends' admiration for being successful in reading. This makes them feel good about themselves as readers. -Children in this study have a positive influence on their peers who are not as motivated to read. | -The level of family involvement may correspond to the level of reading success. -Some children in this study value teacher and peer praise more than others. It does not seem that being highly motivated to read is a factor that plays into the desire to please or impress others. -Family seems to have more influence on children's perceptions as readers. -When children's self-concept in reading is high, they experience pride in reading. |
| 4. Other factors that play a role in children's perceptions of themselves as readers include their positive and negative feelings toward the act of reading, their reading grades, their ability to interact with literature as critical thinkers, their varying vocabulary and reading levels, and the use | -Children in this study understand themselves as readers and are able to determine how constructs impact their self-perceptions as readers. -Children in this study enjoy reading stories that make them connect with the characters and feel like they are living in the story. -Some children in this study | -These children are able to manipulate and control the various factors to meet their needs and enrich their reading experiences. -Just being highly motivated to read does not mean the children do not have reading struggles, especially in reading out loud. -These children do not see |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| of digital technologies. | feel they are good readers but not good at reading aloud.<br>-Children in this study use digital technology when it serves their purpose, such as convenience.  The digital technologies do not seem to motivate them to read more.<br>-The children want to make good grades and are pleased with their reading grades.<br>-They see reading as a way to gain a stronger vocabulary which makes them have a strong self-perception toward reading. | the full potential of utilizing digital technologies in reading tasks. |
| 5. The meaning of reading to the children in my study who were highly motivated to read is multifaceted centered around the purposes of reading, including reading for the pure enjoyment of it, reading for information, reading to fulfill outside requirements, reading to impress others, and reading for internal gratification. Furthermore, reading is a pleasurable and personal experience through exploration of known and unknown settings across genres, or categories, of literature. Reading opens the door to knowledge, creating a space to learn about things of interest and useful facts to help guide future learning and experiences. Reading involves serving the reader with fulfilling various purposes that are motivated by both intrinsic desires and extrinsic needs, with a higher concentration of intrinsic desires than | -Individuals are unique and this includes children who are highly motivated to read.  The meaning of reading to them varies, but the general themes within the meanings are similar.<br>-Intrinsic desires are stronger pulls to read than extrinsic needs because most reading activities of these children involve reading for pleasure and enjoyment of stories.  They value their favorite genres and the stories draw them in. | -Looking at the meaning of reading through the lenses of highly motivated readers provides only a glimpse into their reading perceptions.  More research is needed to determine if this meaning is generally true for most children who are highly motivated to read.<br>-A focus on developing a love of stories is beneficial and leads to intrinsic motivation.  This may be the key to fostering the love of literature, leading to more reading experiences. |

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|---|---|---|
| extrinsic needs. | | |

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