

**Taking Middle School kids back to the adventurous world of literature
through technology**

by

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The problem is that middle school students in Texas **do not practice leisure reading** creating a deficit in their reading skills as measured by the National Center for Education Statistics. Texas students showed an upsetting lack of improvement in reading on the Nation's Report Card. In 2011, the average score of eighth-grade students in Texas was 261. This was lower than the average score of 264 for public school students in the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). **The purpose of this review of literature** was to examine **reading interventions** to promote positive attitudes towards leisure reading. **The need** is to improve reading skills as reflected reading scores on the Nation's Report Card.

Students who do not take time to read tend to have poor reading skills and sadly many students in middle school choose not to read. The transition from elementary to middle school makes an impact to the student's interests and pastimes. Middle school students read less due to time spent with peers, participation in sports activities and other after-school activities, and to a growing lack of interest in textual materials (Johnson, McKenzie, Miranda & Williams-Rossi, 2011). Once the students stop practicing leisure reading, they start struggling with reading. Studies confirm a decline in reading scores on standardized tests, a decline in attitudes towards reading and a growing number of students who have good reading abilities, but choose not to read (Rodriguez & Lira, 1998). When students stop practicing leisure reading they stop exercising their vocabulary affecting their reading comprehension. "The goal of comprehending text is not easily attainable for many adolescents, who demonstrate consistent and persistent difficulties with reading for understanding." (Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed, & Stillman Spisak, 2011). According to rate and accuracy scores, middle school students have shown a tendency in declining grades. One of the reasons might be because decoding to reading comprehension drops in adolescence and older students have more highly developed strategies that reduce their confidence on word identification skills (Reed, 2010).

Middle school students in Texas struggle with their reading skills because most of them do not practice leisure reading. Both qualitative and quantitative studies demonstrate a connection between success in school and the amount of leisure reading

students do (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Krashen, 1993, as cited in Hughes-Hassell & Pradnya Rodge, 2007). The purpose of this literature review is to recognize the problem of students who choose not to read and find a possible solution to motivate them in devoting leisure reading time. There are a numerous of experimental, quantitative, qualitative, descriptive, correlational, and causal-comparative research studies done in the State of Texas and outside of Texas that have identified this problem and gathered data, important information, and suggested interventions to create possible solutions.

According to Knulst & Kraaykamp (1998), leisure reading is the reading students choose to do for pleasure; is the reading done for a hobby or fun, it is a non-school recreational activity. Students in elementary schools do practice leisure reading, but once students get to middle school this practice declines. For some reason many students who are good readers simply choose not to read (Beers, 1998).

Students Do Not Comprehend What They Read

One of the reasons students choose not to read it is due to the lack of reading comprehension making them lose interest in literature. In the article “Understanding the Cause of Intermediate and Middle School Comprehension Problems”, the authors were able to conduct a qualitative study by conducting a causal-comparative research. They determined the reasons of middle school students who struggle with reading is due to the lack of comprehension in specific vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, or an understanding of subjects’ metaphors. They stressed students do not necessarily understand the meaning of words they are able to pronounce (Palumbo & Loiacono, 2009). After analyzing their findings they describe data where it shows students in kinder garden were more exposed to narrative reading than to comprehension skills. They indicate that once the students get to middle school, it is now the teacher’s task to teach reading skills, comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and the multifaceted problems of subject matter text by using a variety of activities, supports, and scaffolds (Palumbo & Loiacono, 2009). As a possible solution, they suggest using a strategy that has being used in the past since 1980 called *Instructional Cloze* (a story summary where every fifth word is deleted to be filled in the blank so students can be engaged in subject matter

knowledge) to improve subject matter comprehension (Palumbo & Loiacono, 2009). Many students don't understand what they read, but comprehension is not the only reason they choose not to read for pleasure.

Skills Alone Do Not Produce Readers

On the other hand, Beers, the author of the article "Choosing Not to Read: Understanding Why Some Middle Schoolers Just Say No", conducted a qualitative research and found out that skills alone do not produce readers. Reading experts recognize that some students leave school with the ability to read, but without the desire (Beers, 1998). Competency tests force many teachers to think they should focus more on reading skills than on reading pleasure (Maracek, 1978, as cited in Beers, 1998). According to Beers, reading can become a desired activity or an undesirable one. One of the great disasters of present-day education is not so much that many students leave school unable to read and to write, but that others graduate disliking reading even with the abilities they might have.

Some of the reasons that indicates as to why students dislike reading is too much television, too little parental modeling, and too much emphasis on a skills approach to reading (Beers, 1998). In order to identify the different kind of readers in middle school, Beers gathered data by conducting interviews to reluctant reading students with open-ended questions on attitudes towards reading. After this, she provided descriptive data that displays characteristics of uncommitted, unmotivated and unskilled readers. With this data, she was able to see patterns of responses and understood students choose not to read for great number of reasons. Those patterns helped her to categorize types of *aliteracy* (Beers, 1998). In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *aliteracy* is stated as the quality or state of being able to read but uninterested in doing so (hacker, 2012). Beers was able to observed devoted and inactive readers want to choose their own books, have teachers read aloud a few pages, meet the author, buy books at a book fair, keep a reading journal, go to the library, participate in panel debates, small group discussions or share books with friends. While uncommitted and unmotivated readers do want to choose their own books from a narrowed choice, have teacher read aloud entire book, compare movie to book, read illustrated books, do art activities based on books, read nonfiction material

such as comic, sports, drawing, cars, fashion, make-up magazines (Beers, 1998). Beers did not give treatments to students in order to determine which reasons causes the distaste in reading, instead she conducted a survey to students about their feelings towards reading to gather qualitative data.

Parents Modeling Leisure Reading

According to the survey Beers conducted, parental modeling takes a big role in encouraging adolescents to literature practice. Devoted and inactive readers talked about their childhood where they remember seeing their parents reading to them at all times of the days and also remember their parents reading books in front of them, everywhere they were. On the other hand, many of the unmotivated students said their parents don't read and they explain their parents used to read to them when they were kids but only before going to bed, it was an activity meant to keep them quiet and make them go to sleep. So they would see reading as a boring activity (Beers, 1998).

This statement was also observed by researchers Hamston and Love, who conducted a quantitative and qualitative study at a private school. Their article is titled: "Voicing Resistance: Adolescent Boys and the Cultural Practice of Leisure Reading". In this research the authors decided to focus on boys, leisure reading, and family reading dispositions due to the concerns raised in the literature regarding boys and literacy (Hamston & Love, 2005). The study was conducted in a three year period at a private boy's school. There were two stages in this research. In the first stage, Hamston and Love focused on 91 boys identified as good and committed leisure time readers. In the second stage, the researchers focused on 75 boys identified as mostly able readers who choose not to read. In both stages of the research, quantitative and qualitative data was gathered from each student through questionnaires about their reading practices, their parents, and the ways their parents share reading with their sons (Hamston & Love, 2005). After observing and analyzing the questionnaires, researchers gathered quantitative and qualitative data where they were able to identify a similar culture for committed readers in the study; their parents guided them and facilitated them with leisure time reading. While reluctant readers show several acts of resistance and they lack enthusiasm to engage in the reading practices due to communication and

relationships between these boys and their parents (Hamston & Love, 2005). The research shows reluctant readers resist to reading novels since they are not highly motivated, they consider these privileged text. However, they are engaging in reading and interacting with multi-media, electronic and complex visual texts that relate to their lives as adolescents, but they still lack the passion in engagement to textual practice. (Hamston & Love, 2005).

The Leisure Reading Habits

In a quantitative and descriptive research done at an urban middle school, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) found an interesting fact about the leisure reading habits. In this particular school, a study was conducted to collect data by administering a 5-page, 20-item questionnaire. It was focused on factors related to reading by choice. For example, whether or not adolescents read in their leisure time; if so, what, when and why do they read? The questionnaire contained multiple-choice and open-ended questions (Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007).

Seventy-two percent of the students indicated that they engaged in reading as a leisure activity, a finding that is consistent with other studies of adolescent reading. Twenty-two percent said they read “constantly”, and 50% indicated they “read when they get a chance.” Six percent of the adolescents indicated that they do not read; the other 22% said they read only for school (Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007, p. 23-24).

These descriptive data exposes good percentage of students who are engaged in leisure reading. However it also raises a question: Why do these adolescents’ reading scores at this particular school remain low when they reported that they engage in leisure reading? (Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007). It has been proven that “students who read in their spare time become better readers, score higher on achievement tests in all subject areas, and have more content knowledge than those who do not” (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991; Krashen, 1993, as cited in Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007). But why is the survey showing otherwise? Hughes-Hassell and Rodge suggest a possible explanation that it involves the type of reading they are doing. In their survey it displays that “books” are not the preferred leisure reading material for both male and female students. In the data

gathered it shows 72% read magazines about sports, video games, and music. Forty four percent of the students liked reading comic books, 37% choose internet reading material and only 30% of the students read books for pleasure (Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007). Reading magazines, comic books and internet material is considered light reading and according to Hafner, Palmer and Tullos (1986), light reading does not automatically result in an ability to read advanced material, it only provides motivation for more reading (Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007).

After the research was conducted and observations were made, the authors provided these are following suggestions for teachers and librarians.

1. Teachers and librarian should provide the types of materials students prefer, including magazines, comic books, and the Internet.
2. Students' culture and heritage need to be respected by providing multicultural resources that are relevant to students' lives, as well as resources in their first language.
3. It is important to talk to students to find out what they are passionate about.
4. Students must be provided with time during the school day to read, because some of them don't have time to read after school.
5. Adequate fund must be provided for school and classroom libraries in low-income urban communities.
6. Summer reading must be encouraged because it is critical to summer learning.
7. It is imperative to partner with parents to promote and encourage leisure reading for "parents play a significant role in developing and sustaining the leisure reading habits of children and adolescents" (Kim, 2004; Strommen & Mates, 2004, as cited in Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007).
8. Teachers and librarians have to be passionate about the love of reading and display the books currently reading by the teacher or librarian.
(Hughes-Hassell, Rodge, 2007).

Struggling Readers and Silent Reading

In the experimental research: "Silent Reading Manifestations of Adolescent Struggling Readers" conducted by the researchers Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla, and Wright,

vital facts were found about the importance of adolescents practicing silent reading. Many struggling adolescents' readers have not fully developed the skill to read silently, discouraging them from finding a passion for reading (Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla & Wright, 2011).

According to Miller (1972), efficient silent reading implies a strong correlation between a rapid reading rate and a high level of comprehension (Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla & Wright, 2011). Reading silently is developmental; students start first grade by reading out loud, but at the end of the school year 50% of these students read silently with correct understanding. Students who could not read silently either vocalized or moved their lips as they read to themselves, slowing down their reading rate (Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla & Wright, 2011).

The purpose of this case study was to discover the connection between speech and reading to oneself among struggling readers in secondary schools. Ninety-five struggling readers in the middle and high school students were chosen as the target population in which they received a treatment for an individual administration of a norm-referenced measure of reading along with direct observations (Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla & Wright, 2011). During the test administrations, examiners observed the students in order to determine whether they read silently or whether they moved their lips, mumbled, or whispered as they read, or whether they read aloud. The exam had reading comprehension passages to observe the recorded student's reading comprehension (Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla & Wright, 2011). After making observations, the researchers found that less than half of the secondary struggling readers read silently when reading to themselves. In other words, the majority of struggling readers do not practice silent reading which is a fundamental aspect of comprehension and rate of comprehension. The authors propose silent reading to be taught to struggling readers, the study demonstrated that it will improve their reading rate and comprehension; this might also encourage them to practice leisure reading. (Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla & Wright, 2011).

Reading Interventions in the Middle Grades

In the qualitative article titled: "Reading Intervention in the Middle Grades", Allington offers five principles to help middle school struggling readers to succeed.

After comparing and contrasting different interventions used in the past without success, his first principle suggests all students need high-quality instruction all day long. He proposes teachers to find appropriate lesson materials, because students need books they can actually read (Allington, 2011). It has been confirmed students cannot learn much from books they cannot read accurately, fluently, and with understanding (Allington, 2007). The second principle is to expand the volume of reading that struggling readers do every day, but do it with a book that they can both read and enjoy. With reading practice matters, struggling readers need to dramatically expand their reading activity (Allington, 2011). It may take years of remediation in which the struggling reader will get better than the achieving peers (Torgeson, 2005). If expanding reading activity among struggling readers is the goal, then the third principle is to provide students with books they can read and books they are interested in reading (Allington, 2011). In the fourth principle, Allington advises not to use decoding instruction for middle school struggling readers because this instruction is rarely useful for older struggling readers. Even when decoding lessons bring struggling older readers' word recognition up to grade level, there is usually no improvement in their reading comprehension (Torgeson & Hudson, 2006). In the fifth and last principle, Allington points out that it is teachers who present the problem that needs to be solved, more than the students do. In other words, it becomes clearer that many of the struggling readers' problems are caused by teachers, especially when they don't take action in providing appropriate instruction. In order to help struggling readers, teacher must provide reading material that is to the student's interest, books they can read and understand to expand their reading time along with reading comprehension (Allington, 2011).

Substantial supportive facts with Allington's fourth principle are found in the article, "Efficacy of a Reading Intervention for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities". Wanzek, Vaughn, Roberts and Fletcher (2011) conducted a one year experimental study which included sixth to eighth grade students with learning disabilities from seven middle schools. In this study, researchers conducted a reading intervention by providing 50 minutes of phonemic decoding instruction to middle school students compared with similar students who did not receive the intervention. No significant differences were found for phonemic decoding fluency and passage

comprehension (Wanzek, Vaughn, Roberts, & Fletcher, 2011). Since no major effect was encountered in this experimental study, Allington's suggestion is correct, teachers should focus more on training struggling readers with reading comprehension by providing time and students' centered interest reading materials which at the same time it promotes leisure reading (Allington, 2011).

Efficacy of Collaborative Strategic Reading

Collaborative strategic reading (CSR) is one of the effective solutions found in reading comprehension for struggling readers. *Collaborative strategic reading* is defined as follows:

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) is a set of four strategies. CSR integrates word identification, reciprocal reading, and cooperative learning. CSR teaches students how to monitor their comprehension and also how to use procedures for clarifying understanding when difficulties arise. Students also learn main idea and questioning practices that assist them on text while reading and guiding group responses to text after reading (Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed & Stillman-Spisak, 2011, p. 940).

The authors Mohammed, Swanson, Roberts, Vaughn, Klingner, Boardman, & SREEA (2010) conducted experimental studies to test the CSR effectiveness for struggling readers. In their article, "The Effects of Collaborative Strategic Reading Instruction on the Reading Comprehension of Middle School Students: Year 1", they explained the experimental study conducted to diverse students who were identified as struggling readers. After their study analysis and the positive impact made on the intervened students, they concluded CSR is an effective practice that should be used as a reading intervention (Mohammed, Swanson, Roberts, Vaughn, Klingner, Boardman, & SREEA, 2010).

A year later, another experimental study was conducted by the authors: Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed and Stillman-Spisak (2011), to examine the effects of collaborative strategic reading and metacognitive strategic learning on the reading comprehension of students. The title of the article is "Efficacy of Collaborative Strategic Reading with Middle School Students". In this study, students

were selected from three school districts from seventh and eighth grade. After they were randomly assigned to class, there were 27 comparison classes and 34 treatment classes. Students in the treatment classes received the intervention and students in the comparison classes received typical instruction (Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed & Stillman-Spisak, 2011). Students in the treatment classes outperformed students in the comparison classes on a standardized reading comprehension exam. After the study findings, authors reassure CSR is an achievable and effective practice that can be integrated into reading and language arts instruction to make a positive impact (Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed & Stillman-Spisak, 2011).

Even though these two experimental studies about CSR effectiveness were completed in the same states, Texas and Colorado, the researchers had different designs and questions with diversity students. In the first study: “The Effects of Collaborative Strategic Reading Instruction on the Reading Comprehension of Middle School Students: Year 1”, the authors targeted identified struggling students and used CSR as a reading intervention to experiment reading comprehension (Mohammed, Swanson, Roberts, Vaughn, Klingner, Boardman, & SREEA, 2010). In the second study: “Efficacy of Collaborative Strategic Reading With Middle School Students”, the researchers focused on the effectiveness of CSR with adolescent readers when applied by well trained and supported CSR teachers (Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed & Stillman-Spisak, 2011).

Reading Time Provided for self-selected books

In order to promote leisure reading, one of the many suggestions made by researchers is to provide reading material that will target the adolescents’ interest and give them time during school to read. To test these recommendations and see students’ attitudes towards reading, Rodriguez and Lira (1998) conducted an experimental study at a middle school in South Texas. The study consisted of providing 30-minute periods five times a week for eight months to 41 eighth grade students. The students’ assignment was to read from self-selected books (books which did not have more than five unknown words on any given page), keep a reading log, take home their books and participate in

the reading club (Rodriguez & Lira, 1998). This experimental design was combined with a descriptive and a group pretest-posttest to determine if there was a significant difference with students' scores before and after the experiment. Rodriguez and Lira (1998) also made observations on students who participated in this study observing for positive attitudes towards reading.

The results point out that most of the students enjoyed the required reading and felt they had improved with their reading skills, specifically their vocabulary and fluency. Even though the study did not reveal significant improvements in reading achievement for the 41 students, however, the study showed greater gains in reading achievement for students with low to average reading abilities than it did with students with better reading abilities (Rodriguez & Lira, 1998). In other words, struggling readers improved their reading abilities, and this fact proves a statement mentioned earlier; it may take years of remediation in which the struggling reader will get better than the achieving peers (Torgeson, 2005).

Successful Engagement with Text Using the E-reader

Making technology part of a motivational reading tool can encourage reluctant students to engage in literature. Johnson, Mckenzie, Miranda & Williams-Rossi (2011) conducted an experimental study in a middle school where 199 students were given 15-25 minutes to read high interest chapter books and stories on the Amazon Kindle® reader. This was done to study the attitudes and response to reading using e-books by reluctant students. After making qualitative observations, the authors found reluctant readers demonstrated motivation in reading, engagement and expressed high levels of satisfaction with the e-readers. Researchers were very satisfied with the reluctant attitudes towards reading after this study, that they recommend e-readers to be used in reading improvement classes as another choice for reading material (Johnson, Mckenzie, Miranda & Williams-Rossi, 2011).

Conclusion

The problem is that middle school students in Texas do not practice leisure reading creating a deficit in their reading skills as measured by the National Center for Education Statistics. Texas students showed an upsetting lack of improvement in reading on the Nation's Report Card. In 2011, the average score of eighth-grade students in Texas was 261. This was lower than the average score of 264 for public school students in the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The purpose of this review of literature was to examine reading interventions to promote positive attitudes towards leisure reading. The need is to improve reading skills as reflected reading scores on the Nation's Report Card.

It has been demonstrated that students who practice leisure reading perform better in many subject areas (Hughes-Hassell & Pradnya Rodge, 2007). Leisure reading is the key to help students improve the standardized test scores. After examining experimental and nonexperimental studies conducted in and out of the state of Texas, it is alarming to know students in the middle schools choose not to read for numerous reasons. In schools, students are not being motivated to read for pleasure, instead teachers focus more on reading skills to pass standardized tests so teenagers are being forced to read lacking the passion to literature (Beers, 1998). Many reading materials offered to students are out of their interest and most of the time these books are filled with unknown vocabulary words causing the student to struggle by not comprehending the reading (Palumbo & Loiacono, 2009). There have been several reading interventions done to help students with vocabulary decoding and reading skills, but researches show the most important of all is reading comprehension; and this can only be obtained when teenagers self-select the reading material (Rodriguez and Lira, 1998). Researches show silent reading is a great way for students to better comprehend text and it helps read at a faster rate, but most of them have not developed this skill (Gilliam, Dykis, Gerla & Wright, 2011). When students enter middle school, their reading habits start declining because they start getting involved in after school activities or just hang out with friends. Time must be provided during school hours for them to dedicate leisure time (Allington, 2011). Parents take a big role in influencing their kids in leisure reading by practicing reading themselves and motivating their kids to practice reading at home (Hamston & Love, 2005). A research study shows teenagers are fascinated with technology and using

electronic devices such as e-readers has made a positive impact on reluctant readers with their attitudes towards reading (Miranda & Williams-Rossi, 2011). Both qualitative and quantitative studies demonstrate a connection between success in school and the amount of leisure reading students do (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Krashen, 1993, as cited in Hughes-Hassell & Pradnya Rodge, 2007).

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