Identifying, Engaging, and Supporting 21st Century Reluctant Readers

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Abstract

Reading is becoming nearly inseparable from life in the 21st century. Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik (1999) suggest that “adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write printed text or alphabetical text more than at any other time in human history” (p. 99). However, engaging with text and reading activities is unappealing to many students in today’s classrooms. This major research paper analyzed contemporary research on reading reluctance and the factors that contribute to this reluctance. Additionally, the study examined previous research to better understand the characteristics of students reluctant to read in grades 4-6. This information has provided the foundation for a handbook designed to help educators identify and engage students who experience a reluctance to read.
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Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................ iii

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM .................................................................................. 1
  Background of the Problem ....................................................................................... 1
  Purpose of the Research ............................................................................................. 3
  Scope and Limitations ............................................................................................... 5
  Significance ................................................................................................................ 6
  Definition of Terms .................................................................................................... 7
  Overview of Subsequent Chapters ............................................................................ 9

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................... 12
  Importance of Reading Activities During Adolescence ........................................... 12
  Changes in Leisure Reading Activities Among Adolescents ....................................... 15
  Contributing Factors of Reading Reluctance ............................................................ 20
  Reluctant Reader Profiles ......................................................................................... 30

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND HANDBOOK DEVELOPMENT ............... 34
  Rationale for the Handbook ..................................................................................... 34
  Guiding Questions ....................................................................................................... 35
  Handbook Goals ......................................................................................................... 35
  Personal Relevance ..................................................................................................... 36
  Process of Research .................................................................................................... 37
  Handbook Structure ................................................................................................... 38

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HANDBOOK .......................................................................... 40
  Table of Contents ....................................................................................................... 43

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS..................... 92
  Reading Reluctance Summary .................................................................................... 92
  Reluctant Reader Profiles .......................................................................................... 93
  Engagement Strategies for Reluctant Readers ............................................................ 94
  Implications for Educators .......................................................................................... 95
  Next Steps for Reluctant Readers .............................................................................. 97
  Concluding Remarks .................................................................................................. 98

References .................................................................................................................... 99
CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Literacy practices have become largely inseparable from daily life in the 21st century. From environmental print to employment requirements to scholarly achievement, proficient literacy skills are often necessary for one to actively engage and participate within a society. Additionally, Janks (2010) argues that a correlation exists between literacy and power, suggesting that those who achieve higher competencies in literary practices often acquire higher levels of social status and academic accomplishment. One paramount aspect of becoming literate is the development of strong reading abilities. Sainsbury (2004) suggests that enthusiastic readers tend to autonomously engage in reading activities, which assists the development of their reading ability. Furthering this understanding, Smith and Day (2013) posit that leisure reading can improve a reader’s attitude, motivation, and confidence. Although research has shown the many benefits of children reading, many students are reluctant to engage in reading activities during their early adolescence (Traux, 2010). For this reason, educators need to be aware of how to identify reluctant readers, have an understanding of the contributing factors of reading reluctance, and be knowledgeable of strategies to engage students in autonomous reading. For the purpose of this research, autonomous reading is defined as a willingness to independently participate in reading activities. This major research paper serves to provide educators with information in the form of a handbook to assist them in identifying, engaging, and supporting reluctant readers in the 21st century.

Background of the Problem

Research suggests that many children become reluctant to engage in reading activities in school (Al-Saleem, 2012; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Nipold, Duthie, & Larsen,
2005; Sainsbury, 2004; Snowball, 2005). In a study conducted by Guthrie and Davis (2003), a sharp decline was documented in the enjoyment of reading reported by students from grades 3 to 8. This suggests that students who are not enjoying what reading has to offer consequently are not spending the time necessary to develop their reading abilities and build confidence in themselves as proficient readers. According to Earl and Maynard (2006), without confidence as a reader, children feel daunted and may utilize a variety of tactics to evade participating in reading activities.

Many factors contribute to reading reluctance among today’s children and adolescents, creating a very complex dilemma in today’s classrooms: a lack of interest, reading difficulty, social culture, and reading as an inadequate form of entertainment (Al-Saleem, 2012; Boehm, 2009). Often, these factors are interrelated and work simultaneously, resulting in reading avoidance. It is important to understand that not all reluctant readers are those who struggle to read.

Although students who resist engagement in reading activities do not necessarily lack proficient reading skills, Lenters (2006) argues that “resistant readers risk becoming struggling readers” (p.136). Furthering this, Demos and Foshay (2010) state that “many struggling readers soon become disengaged readers” (p. 57). With this understanding, it is possible for students of all ability levels to fall behind if they are not continually practicing and developing their reading skills. Therefore a variety of contributing factors to reading resistance need to be explored since these factors have the potential to affect reading ability. Although much research has attempted to create a solid understanding of how/why children are engaged—or disengaged—from reading, there may be very large variations in the reading habits of students from one classroom to another, one city to
another, or one culture to another; so it is a difficult piece of information to find and hold true in its validity.

In an attempt to identify and better serve children showing reluctance to engage in reading activities, researchers have worked to understand some of the reluctant reader profiles and umbrella characteristics that may exist (Al-Saleem, 2012; Boehm, 2009). For example, Al-Saleem (2012) suggests different types of reluctant readers: (a) those who are interested in reading, but don’t read well; (b) those who are not interested in reading at all and without reading practice are at risk of falling behind; and (c) those who read quite well, but choose not to. These profiles are not new, however they have the potential to be problematic in the 21st century because they continue to represent children and adolescents who are disengaged from reading in a time when comprehension of print literacy is more crucial than ever as it gives people access to knowledge, information, and power (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Research in the area of strategies is required to help educators turn reluctant readers into active and autonomous readers who regularly engage with literature.

**Purpose of the Research**

This study seeks to extend the current research and knowledgebase on three important aspects of reading reluctance experienced by children and early adolescents: identifying possible reluctant reader profiles and characteristics, potential factors and influences that contribute to reading reluctance, and efficacious strategies that may help educators mitigate the reluctance of children to engage in autonomous reading activities.

Contemporary research in the field of literacy education encompasses an eclectic variety of conceptualizations of what is meant by the term *reluctant reader* (Al-Saleem,
While some researchers offer a specific definition of the term, many provide a more general understanding, such as Earl and Maynard (2006) as they state, “the term ‘reluctant reader’ is an umbrella term used in educational and related literature to denote a child who does not or cannot read, and who is likely to avoid such an experience at all costs” (p. 163). For the purpose of implementing effective educational strategies to engage reluctant readers in reading activities, I agree with Boehm (2009) in that it may be beneficial to further clarify what is meant by the term reluctant reader on a more specific level. For this reason, one of the purposes of this study is to identify potential reluctant-reader profiles in order to further develop and individualize strategies.

The contributing factors that influence a child’s resistance to reading is of great importance if one wishes to understand and lessen this resistance. It is my belief that understanding the “why” of reading reluctance is a foundational element in establishing strategies that engage and support diverse children in their future reading endeavours. Throughout this research paper, contributing factors and strategies to lessen reading reluctance are discussed. However, it is important to understand that only some of the factors that influence a child’s reading habits are touched upon and that there may be others that are not included in this paper.

Another purpose of this study is to identify strategies that educators can employ to engage children in autonomous reading and match these strategies to individual students based on their identified reluctant reader profile. This portion of the study will be presented in the form of an educative literacy resource—a handbook. This resource is meant to provide educators with additional support in their attempts to reduce student
reluctance to read and make the reading experience more enjoyable and sustainable to each individual student, thus producing lifelong readers.

**Scope and Limitations**

Hansen (1969) reported that students’ independent reading habits established by grades 5 or 6 are often maintained throughout their lifetime (as cited in McKool, 2007). Additionally, Brinda (2011) suggests that negative attitudes towards reading among children may begin around grades 4, 5, and 6. In the interests of improving sustainable and positive reading habits among children and early adolescents, the focus of this study is on elementary students in grades 4, 5, and 6. As researchers such as Megan Traux (2010), have suggested, reading reluctance experienced by students often peaks in middle school. This is because “at this time, academics become less important than the many other factors happening in these students’ lives” (Traux, 2010, p. 4). Thus, this study aims to engage and support students in autonomous reading practices before this time.

As a result of its grade-specific focus, this study encompasses limitations that must be taken into consideration. One limitation of this research is the applicability of its findings. The findings and suggestive approaches to reduce reading reluctance and engage children and adolescents in print-based reading activities may not be efficacious for students in very early grades or beyond middle school. At these grade levels, other factors that have not been taken into consideration may exist that contribute to reading evasion. While this paper may provide a foundation for further research into reading reluctance at other grade levels, and some strategies may in fact be applicable to students of any age, the information presented is intended to assist students in grades 4 to 6.

Another limitation of this research corresponds to the complexity of the problem at
hand and the lack of primary research utilized in this study. There are myriad reasons why individuals resist participating in reading activities. As every student has individual interests, strengths, weaknesses, and sociocultural backgrounds, identifying all of the factors that contribute to reading reluctance is a difficult task. This research aims to identify possible reluctant reader profiles and characteristics, potential factors and influences that contribute to reading reluctance, and efficacious strategies that may assist educators mitigate the reluctance of children to engage in autonomous reading activities. The findings of this research and strategies found within the handbook are not an exhaustive list of effective approaches, nor are they meant to be. Based on the inter-related contributing factors of reading reluctance and a child’s individuality, it may be beneficial to go beyond this research if the strategies do not meet the needs of the student at hand.

As I am in the infancy (i.e., second year) of my career as a teacher, my first-hand experience conducting formal research related to reading reluctance is limited. My approach to this research and handbook are a result of my experience thus far in a classroom setting. Those who have acquired many years of teaching experience and interacting with reluctant readers may have questions that are not answered in this research. I believe that broader, more extensive teaching experience could have impacted the approach to this research and the guiding questions.

**Significance**

This study is significant in several ways. First, though there are many studies and research articles that cover the topic of reading reluctance (Al-Saleem, 2012; Boehm, 2009; Earl & Maynard, 2006; Gambrell, 2010; Lenters, 2006; McKool, 2007; Sainsbury, 2004), the present study is unique in that it sought to pair students with specific methods
and strategies based on their identified reading-reluctance profile. Instead of offering a large list of strategies to encourage students to autonomously read, certain strategies are recommended based on the types of contributing factors that deter students from reading in the first place. This may lessen the time spent during trial and error approaches of strategies for teachers and parents when attempting to captivate students in the world of literacy as it refines the list of potential strategies.

Second, this research was done with the production of an educational resource in mind. Leaning on existing literature about reading reluctance, this handbook provides educators with a resource that is directly applicable to their classrooms and students. This handbook is structured in a well-organized format to ensure quick access. Along with the background information necessary to provide its audience with a sound understanding of reading reluctance and strategies, it also provides a quick reference chart for fast access and to quickly brief educators on the different approaches they may take to assist students with their reading reluctance.

Finally, another significant aspect of this research is that instead of offering a list of contributing factors of reading reluctance, this research categorizes these factors under more manageable classifications. This allows for a better understanding of how reading reluctance factors may be the result of several smaller contributory factors. Additionally, through this approach, one is able to better understand how reading reluctance may be the result of several factors, thus helping educators avoid focusing on just one.

**Definition of Terms**

Certain terms are repeatedly used in previous research on the topic of reading reluctance. As a result, throughout this research paper many of these common terms will
be used, such as reluctant reader, struggling reader, aliterate, engaged reader, and reading activities. However, these terms have been applied in previous research with varying meanings. For the purpose of clarification on the terms used in this research, my intended definition for some of the terms found throughout this paper are provided below.

**Reluctant Readers**

The term reluctant readers is found throughout research, referring to students resistant to engage in reading, be it directed or autonomous. Specifically in this study, reluctant readers refer to those who are unwilling to engage or participate in reading practices. There is often a misconception that reluctant readers are those who struggle with reading. While this may be a factor in some instances, Boehm (2009) argues that “not all reluctant readers fall into the category of ranking poorly academically” (p. 75). Many students who may be identified as reluctant readers are able to read quite well but prefer not to read for different reasons. These students are represented by the term “aliterate.”

**Aliterate**

While the term illiterate refers to those who are unable to read or write, Merga (2014) defines aliteracy as “the state in which an individual has acquired the skill to read, but chooses not to” (p. 473). This term is applicable to the many students who show proficiency in their reading abilities, but lack the willingness and desire to do so autonomously. While some reluctant readers are categorized as aliterate, many are not if they in fact encounter difficulties when attempting to derive meaning from text. These students may be classified as struggling readers.

**Struggling Reader**

The term struggling reader is reserved for those who find the process of reading to
be troublesome and difficult. This term is often used in a vague sense as there are numerous factors that contribute to one’s struggle when attempting to read. For example, some students might be considered struggling readers if they exhibit poor comprehension, while other students might also be considered struggling readers if they have difficulty decoding text. When using the term struggling reading, it may be beneficial to further specify what aspect of the reading process with which a person is encountering difficulty.

**Engaged Reader**

The term engaged reader is often found throughout the literature on reluctant readers. An engaged reader can be considered the antonym of a reluctant reader. The engaged reader often practices reading and becomes mentally involved in the text and the process of reading. Brinda (2011) defines engaged readers as those who “comprehend, enjoy, and create personal connections with literature” (p. 11). Engaged readers are not necessarily those who can easily and effectively read texts, but those who actively enjoy the process and benefits of engaging in reading activities.

**Reading Activities**

Throughout this paper, the term reading activities refers to any activity that requires one to derive meaning from print-based text. This paper strives to expand any traditional sense of reading activities relating narrowly to books to any activity that involves decoding text and text-based comprehension. Examples of reading activities can include, but are not limited to, printed books, online articles, newspapers, peer writing, comics, social networking text, etcetera.

**Overview of Subsequent Chapters**

This paper has been organized and structured into five chapters. Following this
introductory chapter, chapter 2 of the paper presents the review of current literature relative to reading reluctance among children at the junior grade level (grades 4-6). Throughout this chapter, contemporary research studies and scholarly journal articles will be analyzed to embed this research paper in existing literature and to provide an understanding of research that has been previously conducted on the topic under scrutiny.

Chapter 3 provides an understanding of the methodology used to conduct, gather, and analyze the information used in the construction of the handbook and this paper. This chapter discusses the theoretical approach used to conduct the research. It provides the initial vision of what the handbook was meant to be and how it is to be applied within an educational context as an assistive literacy resource. The guiding research questions of this research paper are also listed and examined in this chapter. Finally, the methodology chapter states the goals of the handbook as well as the process of its creation and the structure of the handbook.

The handbook itself comprises chapter 4 of this major research paper. The handbook provides strategies to assist educators when working with children who have a reluctance to reading. Additionally, the handbook provides vignettes based on potential reluctant-reader profiles discussed in chapter 2 of this paper. This is meant to assist educators in determining which profile(s) their reluctant reading students may fall under based on the behaviours they exhibit. Reading engagement strategies that correspond to the above-mentioned profiles are then proposed to aid the engagement and support of those students who resist participating in reading activities.

Chapter 5 of this major research paper discusses the findings and implications of the research. In this chapter, the possible reluctant-reader profiles, the contributing
factors of reading reluctance, and the proposed strategies that appear throughout this paper are situated as the findings of the research that was undertaken. Following the discussion of the above findings, the implications of the research and the research findings are explored. The implications that this research and handbook may have for educators and students who are reluctant to engage in reading activities will be discussed to understand how it may impact literacy education and the engagement of students in developing fortified reading skills in their junior elementary grades. Finally, limitations of the study are also discussed.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently in the field of education, much research has been undertaken to address the issue of reading reluctance experienced by students at the elementary level (Al-Saleem, 2012; Boehm, 2009; Earl & Maynard, 2006; Gambrell, 2010; Lenters, 2006; McKool, 2007; Sainsbury, 2004). A common focus of these research endeavours has been to identify the contributing factor(s) of reading disengagement. An additional area of focus found in contemporary research on this topic pertains to finding efficacious approaches that may motivate and encourage these students to autonomously read and find enjoyment from interacting and connecting with literature.

This section of the paper reviews previous research on reading reluctance. To better situate the proposed strategies for reluctant readers found in the handbook, a review of research on the habits of leisure reading activities among adolescents has been conducted. Additionally, some of the documented factors that contribute to the resistance to engage in reading practices experienced by students in grades 4, 5, and 6 is included, as well as five reluctant-reader profiles. However, to better understand the criticality of this issue, the importance of engaging in reading activities and developing sound literacy skills shall be discussed.

Importance of Reading Activities During Adolescence

Many educators and researchers agree on the importance of developing strong reading skills (Lenters, 2006; Merga, 2014; Sainsbury, 2004; Snowball, 2005). Kolawole (2005) believes that reading is a cornerstone of literacy, and also that the education process is largely dependent on a child’s ability to read effectively. Like the development of many other skills, effective reading is largely influenced by the amount of time one
spends interacting with text. In support of this belief, Sainsbury (2004) suggests that “children who are enthusiastic readers tend to read more, and this develops their reading ability” (p. 49). There are many reasons why engaging in reading activities and strengthening reading skills are beneficial to an adolescent’s life, both inside and outside of the classroom. Effective reading skills allow for students to achieve higher proficiencies in other academic areas, which aids in the development of their identity and social and emotional well-being, and helps them to navigate through life in the 21st century (Churchwell, 2010; Lenters, 2006; Moore et al., 1999).

Krashen (2004) found that as children engage in reading activities and develop their reading abilities, they often strengthen other literacy skills—such as writing, grammar, and vocabulary—often without conscious effort. These skills are by no means limited to language arts. In one study by Churchwell (2010), where 479 young adolescent students’ literacy and other content area skills were studied, a significant correlation was found between students’ reading achievement measured by the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) and other subject areas, including science and social studies. Similar to these findings, in a separate study led by Hofferth and Sandberg (2001), children who spent more time reading for pleasure achieved higher scores on multiple cognitive tests, such as a passage comprehension and calculation tests, than those who reported less time autonomously reading. While strengthening reading skills through autonomous engagement has the potential for higher levels of achievement in other areas, it also has the possibility of aiding one’s social and emotional well-being (Dungworth, Grimshaw, McKnight, & Morris, 1999; Sainsbury, 2004). For example, literature can offer scope for positive social and emotional development as “it opens up
opportunities to become involved in other, real or imaginary worlds, sharing in knowledge, relationships and feelings that go beyond their direct experience” (Sainsbury, 2004, p. 49).

Adolescence is a critical time for the development of one’s identity (Kilmstra, 2013). Engaging in reading activities allows students to be exposed to many different characters, cultures, situations, and conflicts. Through this exposure, students may well be able to relate to characters, compare their culture to others, and connect their life events to events in a text. Lenters (2006) suggests that students who are reluctant to engage in reading activities “may miss out on the valuable role literature can play in identity formation” (p. 140). Lenters believes that when students engage with reading, they have the opportunity to reflect upon their identity and how they are situated within their own world. Reading allows students to immerse themselves in worlds comparable or exotically different from their own where they are able to learn about the identities, traits, and actions of others. These benefits of reading were also recognized by adolescent readers in a survey conducted by Dungworth et al. (2004); the results from the survey showed that the year-5 students who participated in the surveys said they enjoyed reading because of the positive emotions they felt.

Like Dungworth et al. (2004), many agree that reading permeates almost all aspects of life in today’s societies (Holden, 2004; Moore et al., 1999; Snowball, 2005). Addressing the importance of strong reading abilities and literacy skills among today’s adolescents, Moore et al. (1999) state:

Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of
literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. They will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read can be crucial. (p. 99)

In a time of public access to an unprecedented amount of information, the ability to read, analyze, and filter high volumes of print-based information is of paramount importance. This requirement of sound reading skills is addressed in Snowball’s (2005) statement:

There is no getting away from the printed word in everyday life, whether at home, school, or work. You have to read wherever you go—in books, in newspapers, in magazines, on signs, on television, or when surfing the internet. (p. 43)

According to Gambrell (2010), students who do not regularly engage in reading activities and who are not motivated to read may not be achieving their true reading potential, which may implicate their future endeavours.

Changes in Leisure Reading Among Adolescents

To understand if leisure-reading rates may have changed over time, it is worthwhile to understand how often adolescents are engaging with literature autonomously. It may prove beneficial for educators to become familiar with the reading habits as well as the culture of their students in order to engage them in reading activities. Some important considerations are: the rates in which adolescents are engaging in leisure reading activities, how these rates may have changed in comparison to previous cohorts, and how the time spent reading and attitude towards reading may change as students progress through elementary and middle school. This information may help one to better
understand how children are engaging with reading as they progress through elementary school and how it may or may not contrast the reading habits of students in the past.

If one wishes to assist (or be prepared to assist) reluctant readers, it may prove beneficial to understand how often students may be interacting with print-based text. However, as there may be very large variations in the reading rates of students from one classroom to another, one city to another, or one culture to another, it is a difficult piece of information to find and hold true in its validity. That being said, researchers have attempted to gain insight into the reading habits and leisure reading rates reported by students. For example, a study conducted by Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson (2006) gathered information on the frequency with which adolescents spent time reading in 2002; their study reported that of the 594 participants ages 11 to 12, the students reported reading for leisure on average close to 3 days per week (the length of time the students reported reading during these days was not included in the study). Similarly, in a study conducted by Hofferth and Sandberg (2001), time diaries completed by the parent(s) of 883 students ages 9 to 12 showed an average reading time of only 1 hour and 15 minutes per week. A major significance of both study findings is that engaging in reading activities did not appear to be a daily priority for many adolescents.

A study conducted by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) involving self-reported information from 584 adolescent students in an urban school setting found that 72% of students reported engaging in reading for leisure, 6% said they do not read, and 22% said they only read for school. Another interesting finding they shared was that only 17% of their participants continued to read leisurely through the summer months, which according to Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003) and Lawrence (2009) may assist
students and is critical for summer learning. Hughes-Hassell and Rodge suggest that these findings are similar to results from other studies on adolescent reading. The findings from their study is alarming as 28% of students reported that they are either unwilling to read or will only read when required to do so for school. These students may be the reluctant readers of focus in this research paper and also those who might benefit from structured methods to increase reading engagement. Additionally, in both of the above studies, and in research conducted by Clark and Rumbold (2006), girls reported spending more time reading for pleasure than boys. While it may be beneficial to have an idea of current adolescent reading engagement, it is also important to consider whether this reading engagement has changed over time.

An important consideration of reluctant readers and reading engagement that must be addressed is how/if the number of reluctant readers in the classroom is changing over time. The question, then, is: Are more students engaging with print-based text than previous years, or are today’s classrooms experiencing higher numbers of reluctant readers than in the past? Some researchers, such as Hall and Coles (1999) and Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson (2006), suggest that self-reported reading rates and reading engagement may have increased for young adolescents when compared to previous years. However, others argue that children and adolescents are experiencing an overall decline in reading engagement and activities when compared to previous cohorts (Sainsbury, 2004; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004).

Results from a study conducted by Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson (2006) suggested that there is a steady increase in time spent reading among students aged 11 and 12 from 1985 to 2002. The results suggest an increase in average hours spent reading
per week of 1.5 hours, from almost 2.5 hours to 4 hours. The increased pattern in time spent reading for 11 and 12 year olds is shown also in the 15 and 16 year old participants, though with less magnitude. Another interesting finding reported by Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson is that their data suggest that there is an increasing number of students who choose not to read, but for those who do, they are spending more time reading than previous cohorts. These findings are supported by a separate survey by Hall and Coles (1999) involving over 8,000 children. The results suggested that reported book reading has increased from 1979-1999 from 2.39 books per month to 2.52 books per month among students 10 years of age. Hall and Coles also found 14 year olds reported a decline in reading over the same time. While these studies provide results that show an increase in reading engagement among young adolescents, there is also research to suggest a decline of reading engagement among those of similar age.

Marian Sainsbury (2004) facilitated a study that provided interesting results. Sainsbury’s study used a questionnaire to gather data from 28 schools involving over 1,100 participants in grades 4 and 6. Data were gathered in 1998 and again 2003, both times with the same questionnaire. The results of this study suggested that compared to the responses from 1998, “children in year 6 are now less likely to enjoy reading stories, less likely to want to go to the library, and more likely to prefer watching television than reading” (Sainsbury, 2004, p. 53). These findings were also reflected in the responses from the year-4 students involved in the study. The decline of engaged readers between 1998 and 2003 was reported as 77% to 65% for year-6 students and 77% to 71% for year-4 students. A similar decrease in reading enjoyment was also suggested by a survey conducted by McKenna, Ellsworth, and Kear (1995). From Sainsbury’s (2004) study, it
appears that there may be differences in the attitudes and engagement of adolescents when it comes to leisure reading between previous cohorts. However, a third repeat survey was conducted in 2007 by Sainsbury and Clarkson (2008) where the decline of reported reading enjoyment had halted between 2003 and 2007. From the discrepancy and contrast in the studies that have been performed, it is difficult to suggest with confidence whether there is a true significant change in the reading engagement of today’s children in comparison to those of previous cohorts. However, there is evidence to suggest that reading engagement and time spent reading changes for many students as they progress through elementary school into middle school and beyond (Brinda, 2011; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Johnsson-Smaragdi & Jönsson, 2006; Sainsbury, 2004; Traux, 2010).

Some teachers may expect young adults to build a positive attitude towards print-based leisure reading as they strengthen their reading abilities. However, Sainsbury (2004) found in her study involving students in grades 4 and 6 that “attitudes to reading are therefore slightly more positive overall amongst younger children” (p. 51). As she suggests a changing attitude towards reading, Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson (2006) found differences in the amount of time spent reading among 11/12 year olds and 15/16 year olds in their study. In three different years of data collection (1994, 1998, and 2002), 11/12 year old students spent more time on average reading than the 15/16 year olds involved in the study.

While it may be difficult to pinpoint when reading reluctance peaks, Brinda (2011) and Traux (2010) agree that reading disengagement is prominent during the transition to and throughout the middle school years. Others, such as Guthrie and Davis (2003), suggest a decline in engagement from grade 3 to grade 8. As some students seem
to become reluctant readers as they progress through school, teachers need to be prepared to reverse these patterns and reengage students into the world of literature and print-based text. However, before this can be done, it may be beneficial to understand the potential characteristics of reluctant readers.

**Contributing Factors of Reading Reluctance**

Children and early adolescent students may become nonreaders or disengaged readers for different reasons. The current research related to reading engagement shows that a range of contributory factors may act to prevent elementary students from actively engaging in reading activities (Al-Saleem, 2012; Boehm, 2009; Demos & Foshay, 2010; Earl & Maynard, 2006; Lenters, 2006; Stringer & Mollineux, 2003). As students are unique, so too are the factors that may be holding them back from becoming engaged readers. To effectively examine some of the contributing factors of reading reluctance, umbrella categories will be used for organization and manageability purposes. These categories are: cognitive/emotional factors, reading ability factors, cultural/attitude factors, motivational factors, and social factors. Within each of these categories, the contributing factors that deter students from reading will be explored to further understand why some adolescents may be disengaged readers.

**Cognitive/Emotional Factors**

Some researchers agree that there are students who may resist reading as a result of cognitive or emotional factors (Earl & Maynard, 2006; Stringer & Mollineux, 2003; Traux, 2010). These types of factors may weigh down on students’ psyche, preventing them from involving themselves with reading activities. Some of the reoccurring emotional factors found in current literature will be discussed. One cognitive/emotional factor that appears
throughout current research in reading engagement is the confidence students have in their reading ability and in themselves as readers (Earl & Maynard 2006; Traux, 2010).

Earl and Maynard (2006) argue that “a key issue of vital importance to the issue of reluctant readers is confidence” (pp. 163-164). They also suggest students’ low confidence in reading ability or fear of failure may cause students to adopt the mindset that if they do not try, they cannot fail. These thoughts and emotions may prevent many students from even attempting to read leisurely and those who do may receive no pleasure in doing so. However, if students’ confidence in their abilities as readers can be achieved, they may very well become further engaged in reading as “the more confident a reader is, the more he or she will choose to read” (Traux, 2010, p. 7). Additionally, interviews conducted by McKool (2007) suggest a correlation between the confidence of a reader and the time that reader spends engaged in reading activities. It may therefore be advantageous for teachers to take time to monitor their students’ confidence as readers.

Another cognitive/emotional factor that has been suggested to deter adolescents from reading engagement is the label(s) that may be placed upon them (Boehm, 2009). Boehm (2009) insists that teachers need to be careful when labeling students as reluctant readers. Without respecting the immense diversity between reluctant readers, these students may be assumed to share all the same characteristics, and stereotyping may then occur. Also, openly labeling students as reluctant may have negative implications on their confidence as readers. Stringer and Mollineux (2003) suggest that placing these labels on early adolescents “may harm reluctant readers at a time when they are most sensitive to social comparison with peers” (p. 74). It is also argued that students who are aware of being labeled as reluctant readers may give up or become blind to the need to try to read (Boehm, 2009).
Another interesting factor in the current research that may prevent students from engaging with text is the emotional feelings and experiences that students associate with reading. Demos and Foshay (2010) suggest that some reluctant readers associate reading with unpleasant experiences. Thus, leisure reading does not appeal to them as a rewarding activity, but instead is one that is viewed as an unenjoyable activity. However, Margolis and McCabe (2006) found that students’ motivation for reading and confidence could be increased through positive experiences with text. Teachers must be careful to create these enjoyable reading experiences for their students to ensure their engagement. Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest that if a child has negative experiences with reading, “it is probable that they will become reluctant to read when they are older” (p. 178). With this in mind, negative reading experiences may create mental blocks in students’ minds.

**Reading Ability**

Students’ reading ability may have a profound impact on their willingness to engage with reading (Ambe, 2007; Brinda, 2011; Lenters, 2006). As stated by Demos and Foshay (2010), “many struggling readers soon become disengaged readers” (p. 57). Continual struggles with reading may lead to feelings of frustration and helplessness. Comprehension, the ability to derive meaning from text, does not come easy for many students (Stringer & Mollineux, 2003). The ability to comprehend what one is reading is critical to an enjoyable and engaging experience. If students struggle to comprehend what they are reading, they may miss out on personal connections to the text or have difficulty deriving information from it. As Ertem (2013) explains, “without comprehension, reading word is reduced to mimicking the sounds of language, repeating text is nothing more than memorization and oral drill” (p. 220). To complicate the issue of comprehension
difficulties further, students may also struggle with comprehension for different reasons. For example, struggles with visualization may thus become factors that contribute to reading reluctance experienced by early adolescents when they begin to read novels.

Boehm (2009) states that the “lack of being able to visualize a text is another reason why some people are reluctant readers” (pp. 79-80). Additionally, Beers (2003) argues that when students cannot effectively visualize what they are reading, it negatively implicates the connection between the reader and text. Thus, visualization is a strategy that is important for students to derive pleasure from reading. Experiencing difficulties, such as visualizing elements of a text, may heavily disadvantage students. Conversely, Stringer and Mollineux (2003) believe comprehension issues may arise if early adolescent students are too literal in their interpretation of texts, demonstrating challenges with their ability to make inferences.

Moreover, Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009) suggest that comprehension struggles could be the result of students’ inability to select reading material that is appropriate for their reading ability. The lack of personal connection and engagement with texts may turn reading into an unenjoyable activity for students, causing it to be a factor contributing to reading reluctance. Other factors that may contribute to students’ difficulties include decoding text, language barriers (Ambe, 2009; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Stringer & Mollineux, 2003), learning disabilities (Al-Saleem, 2012; Stringer & Mollineux, 2003), and limited vocabularies (Ambe, 2009).

**Cultural/Attitude Factors**

The attitude towards reading that children experience in their home environment and culture can greatly influence whether they seek out opportunities to read
autonomously. Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest that “if the parent does not actively promote the importance of reading, then it becomes probable that the child will not attribute importance to it either” (p. 176). Attitudes towards reading may be an important factor that causes children and early adolescents to become engaged/disengaged or interested/disinterested in reading activities. Al-Hazza (2010) confirms this statement; she believes that students’ culture is very influential on their motivation to engage in leisure reading. It makes sense that culture and attitudes toward literacy are interdependent as they shape how an individual perceives reading. The cultures that influence reading habits are found in both the home of students and within the classroom, both of which are integral to the attitude one adopts towards reading (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Gambrell, 2010; Fredricksen, 2010).

Gambrell (1996) argues that teachers play a critical role in establishing a classroom culture that places value on and encourages reading engagement. With this in mind, it is expected that classroom cultures that have a strong positive attitude and approach towards literacy and reading and may produce more engaged readers. Additionally, the lack of these positive attitudes towards reading within a student’s classroom in turn may have the potential to contribute to less time spent reading in the classroom and/or reading reluctance. While students are embedded within a particular culture and set of attitudes at home, the ways that they think about reading at school may influence their willingness to engage in reading, in and beyond the home. According to McKool (2007), students who engage in reading activities outside of school are likely to live in a home that places value on reading within the home.

Indeed, the culture and attitudes toward reading that students experience in their
home influence their own attitudes and willingness to read (Boehm 2009; Earl & Maynard 2006; Traux 2010). Aligned with this understanding, Traux (2010) poses the thought, “if children live in a home where reading is not valued or practiced, how are they to know that reading is something they should do” (p. 6). In other words, students who come from a home where little value is placed on reading, or perhaps the parents are also reluctant readers, might not know or be hesitant to engage in reading activities outside of the home. Traux (2010) states that when “students see their own family members interacting with text, the act of reading immediately becomes connected to their home lives, making it more powerful” (p. 6). Perhaps then, as Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest, “the solution to overcoming [reading] reluctance does not fundamentally lie within academia, but within the home” (p. 179).

It has been shown how important family and parents are to reading engagement (Traux, 2010). However, many factors may prevent parents from reading themselves or with their child. For example, parents may be reluctant to read themselves. If parents feel insecure about their own reading, they may (even unconsciously) pass on these attitudes to their children. Other influential factors might include the amount of free time they have, the competing schedules of a parent and child, unfamiliarity with the language of the texts, and restricted access to literature. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that a reluctant reader has parents who do not value reading itself.

**Motivational Factors**

Many researchers agree that motivation plays a key role when it comes to reading engagement (Al-Hazza, 2010; Ambe, 2007; Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Marinak, Malloy, & Gambrell, 2010; Stringer & Mollineux, 2003; Traux, 2010). For the purpose of this
paper, reading motivation is defined as one’s willingness and autonomy to engage with print-based text and reading activities. It is also important to note that reading motivation may be found in both intrinsic and extrinsic forms (Al-Hazza, 2010). Gambrell (2010) argues that “students who are highly motivated to read will pursue reading, make time for reading, and develop the reading habit” (p. 14). It may therefore be the absence of this motivation that leaves many students disengaged and reluctant to read. Similarly, Stringer and Mollineux (2003) suggest that lack of motivation often drives and exacerbates reading reluctance. Thus, what facilitates this lack of motivation must be addressed if one is to assist reluctant readers and establish reading motivation. While there are a myriad of factors that may contribute to the lack of reading motivation a child or early adolescent has, there are notable factors that appear repeatedly throughout current literature on reading reluctance, such as viewing reading as a valueless activity.

Gambrell (2010) and Traux (2010) agree that students who are unaware of the value associated with reading may be largely unmotivated to engage in reading activities. It is understandable that viewing an activity as lacking value would greatly diminish one’s motivation and willingness to autonomously engage with it. Reading is not an exception to this. Conversely, as Gambrell (2010) argues, “the highly motivated reader recognizes the value of reading and the affordances it offers” (p. 15). For this reason, it may prove beneficial for educators to focus on helping their students discover the values inherent in reading, and especially for the students identified as reluctant readers. This is a difficult task for those teachers and role models who do not themselves value the reading process. It has been suggested by Traux (2010) that “if teachers and other role models for reluctant readers enjoy and value reading, then these
students will too” (p. 9). While it may not be as simple as this to instill the value of reading in adolescents, it is a great idea to project the positive values of reading onto students. While recognizing reading as an important activity may increase motivation to engage with text, another barrier to becoming a motivated reader is a disinterest in available reading material.

Many researchers agree that students often become disengaged with reading as a result of having little interest in the reading material they have access to or are assigned to read for school (Guthrie & Davies, 2003; Marinak et al., 2010; Stringer & Mollineux, 2003; Traux, 2010). Boehm (2009) suggests that even though students do well academically, some become reluctant readers when they “have not found a book that is interesting to them” (p. 77). Traux (2010) believes that the lack of interest in reading material is a paramount contributing factor that contributes to one’s reluctance to engage with reading activities. Additionally, she suggests that a passion in reading may be established if readers find a book that aligns with their individual interest or a book that seems purposeful to their lives within their situated contexts. With this in mind, it can be argued that when students have books that they are personally interested in available to them, their intrinsic motivation for engaging with these texts may be ignited. The questions remains then, what makes a book interesting to today’s adolescents?

Landt (2013) provides insight into this question as he suggests, “a motivating factor in students’ interest in reading involves the ability of students to relate with the material” (p. 2). A lack of personal and meaningful connection with reading material may also present itself as a barrier to one’s motivation to engage with reading activities. When it comes to reluctant readers’ motivation to engage with literature, it becomes apparent
that the value one associates with reading and personal interest in the available reading material may be critical components of an adolescent’s willingness to read.

**Social Attitudes and Interactions**

In the current literature and research pertaining to reading reluctance, it has been suggested that social factors may influence whether adolescents engage with reading activities (Brinda, 2011; Clark & Osborne, 2007; Gambrell, 1996; Merga, 2014). In a study conducted by Merga (2014), many students reported receiving very little encouragement to read from their peer groups; Merga also suggests that “the attitude of the peer group as a whole towards books may also have an impact on adolescents’ attitudes towards recreational book reading” (p. 473). Thus, a peer group with a dominating negative attitude towards engaging with reading activities may not be conducive to engaging reluctant readers within that group. When it comes to factors contributing to reading reluctance, social factors may present themselves in different ways; for example, adolescents being deprived of opportunities to socially interact with peers about books (Clark & Osborne, 2007).

In a study conducted by Clark and Osborne (2007), social interaction around text being read was suggested to be a positive influence on readers. Alternatively, Clark and Osborne state that “self-defined non-readers do not appear to have, or at the very least do not perceive themselves as having, the same opportunities for social interactions around reading as their reading peers” (p. 23). Without social interaction with peers surrounding the books read, reluctant readers may feel alone or isolated during their reading experiences. This may have the potential to deter adolescents who are social learners and enjoy activities involving social interactions from engaging in reading activities. Brinda
also believes in social interaction within the classroom around books. She argues that students, including reluctant readers, want to share their reading experiences with both their teacher and peers. It must, however, also be noted that social interaction around books may not be a positive experience for all in the classroom, as Merga (2014) suggests that “for some, reading is an intensely private experience” (p. 480). With this understanding, again the theme of readers as unique individuals remains. Along with the absence of opportunities for social interaction around books being a possible contributor to reading reluctance, so too might a lack of encouragement.

Researchers reference a lack of social encouragement as aiding to the reluctance of adolescents to engage with reading activities (Clark & Osborne, 2007; Merga, 2014). A study by Merga (2014) gathered information on the sources of encouragement to read reported by 520 adolescent respondents. The results of the study suggested that friends were among the lowest source of encouragement to read. Additionally, only 49% of the participants reported being encouraged to read by their mothers, and 25% by their fathers. Merga (2014) also argues that from the data collected, “it appears that a relationship exists between reading frequency and positive encouragement from friends” (p. 476). In a separate study conducted by Clark and Osborne (2007), 56.3% of self-identified nonreaders reported that nobody at home encourages them to read, compared to 12.4% reported by adolescents who considered themselves to be readers. Both of the above studies suggest that social encouragement, from both family and peer groups, may have a strong influence over an adolescent’s reading engagement. Those who are encouraged less often are more likely to be identified as nonreaders compared to those who receive encouragement.
Reluctant Reader Profiles

Without some type of classification, it may prove difficult to engage children with reading activities as a result of the overwhelming complexity of the issue, such as the innumerable contributing factors and potential engagement strategies pertaining to reading reluctance found in current literature. However, assuming all students who do not wish to read autonomously fit into the same group of nonreaders would do little to differentiate between these contributing factors that help facilitate reading reluctance and therefore may hinder reading engagement attempts. Perhaps as Boehm (2009) suggests, specific clarification is needed when referring to disengaged readers. This classification should not be so broad as to disregard important individual differences, but not too specific in that it creates an unmanageable amount of categories.

The existing research on reluctant readers has caused me to differentiate between these students with the idea of four reluctant reader profiles, three of which are briefly alluded to by Al-Saleem (2012). These profiles include: (a) children who read well, but choose not to; (b) children who wish to read, but their struggles with reading deters them; (c) students who are uninterested in reading and who struggle with reading; (d) students who are experiencing emotional/learning barriers that prevent them for engaging with reading; and (e) children who face cultural circumstances that might deter them from reading. A more detailed description of each profile shall be explored.

Children Who Can Read Well but Choose not to Engage in Reading Activities

Many reluctant readers fall into this profile. They are the children who can read well, but are rarely, if ever, found with a book in their hand or actively reading as a leisure activity. Brinda (2011) refers to reluctant readers who fit this profile as “someone
who is capable of reading but chooses not to read” (p. 9). Similarly, Al-Saleem (2012) denotes these reluctant readers as “the child who reads well but has little interest in doing so” (p. 2). Students classified into this reluctant-reader profile may be very intelligent and high achievers who do well in all areas of school, but lack the ambition or motivation to engage in reading activities.

**Children Who Want to Read but Struggle**

Reluctant readers fitting this profile have difficulty with the process of reading. They may thoroughly enjoy books, magazines, comics, and other print-based materials but encounter frustration while reading that deters them from engaging with print-based text. Al-Saleem (2012) refers to these students as intelligent, encompassing, and interested in reading, but they do not read well. From my experience, these students may love reading alongside another person who can assist them with their reading, but choose not to read as a leisure activity individually. While not all struggling readers shy away from print-based interaction, Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest that “even a child who enjoys reading but is not as good as they would like to be can become a reluctant reader” (p. 166).

**Students With Little Interest in Reading and Who Do not Read Well**

This profile refers to students identified as reluctant readers who have little to no interest in engaging in reading activities and who also experience difficulty when reading. These students are those who evade reading at all costs and show little to no attempt or desire to strengthen their reading skills. Providing aid to these students may be the most challenging of these four profiles. Not only must a value and interest in reading be discovered, but also the student must simultaneously endure the struggles of building
upon the skills necessary to become a proficient reader. These students may adamantly refuse to engage with print-based reading activities without providing reason.

Children Reluctant to Read as a Result of Emotional/Learning Barriers

Reluctant readers exhibiting this profile may be able to read and in fact enjoy reading. However, barriers may exist that prevent them from engaging with reading. Al-Saleem (2012) refers to children in this profile as those who may be dealing with specific learning problems/disabilities that hinder their willingness to autonomously engage in reading activities. To create a profile that is more inclusive, I argue that emotional barriers may also contribute to a student’s reluctance to read, as Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest that emotional and cognitive problems can hinder a child’s motivation to read, such as having little confidence in one’s reading ability. From my experience, these students may seem interested in reading some days, and on other days do everything they can to avoid it. They might also be willing to read in certain situations or times of the day but not during others.

Children Who Are Reluctant to Read Due to Cultural Factors

Reluctant readers of this profile may not be engaging with reading activities as a result of the culture and the cultural norms within which they are embedded. Many researchers agree that students’ willingness and perception of reading is highly influenced by their surrounding culture (Boehm 2009; Earl & Maynard 2006; McKool, 2007; Traux 2010). If a student experiences a culture—whether in the home, at school, or elsewhere—that does not place value on reading, they might adopt the perception that reading is not worthwhile or of importance. This may lead to children opting not to read and to pursue other activities instead.
While not every reluctant reader may easily fit one of the above profiles, it serves as a starting point to discuss individual differences of reading reluctance and perhaps to assist students in their future reading endeavours. With an understanding of which profile a reluctant reader may be associated with, one may also be able to better identify the contributing factors that are causing a student to avoid engaging in reading activities and effective strategies.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND HANDBOOK DEVELOPMENT

This chapter serves to explore the rationale, goals, and guiding questions that shaped how the research was undertaken and presented. It provides an understanding of the personal relevance the topic of reluctant readers has to the author and the author’s experiences. It is this personal relevance that piqued my interest towards this project and the creation of the handbook, *Engaging Reluctant Readers in the 21st Century*. Additionally, this chapter outlines the process of research that was conducted to gain a more holistic understanding of reading reluctance and the suggested strategies and approaches found in the handbook. Finally, the creation process and structure of the handbook will be discussed to provide insight into the author’s intended outcome and how the handbook was specifically formatted for ease of use by elementary teachers.

**Rationale for the Handbook**

Research has suggested that some students are reluctant to engage in reading activities (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Nipold et al., 2005; Sainsbury, 2004; Snowball, 2005). With the multitude of benefits that reading provides to youth discussed in the previous chapter, a lack of reading engagement creates an area of concern in today’s classrooms that merits attention. Al-Saleem (2012) suggests that “one of the most difficult problems that face teachers at classroom is the presence of students who do not want to read” (p. 1). It is this concern that provides a strong rationale for the need of assisting elementary school teachers confront the dilemma of reluctant readers. While there might be several approaches to meet this need in today’s schools, providing teachers with pertinent research on reluctant readers and divergent strategies aimed to engage students in a world of reading may provide beneficial outcomes. Through current research into the area of
reading reluctance, a handbook was created to provide elementary school educators with a place to start and ideas on how to accommodate and engage reluctant readers in the 21st century.

**Guiding Questions**

The research that was conducted and presented in this handbook was heavily influenced by a set of three guiding questions. These questions are:

1. What factors most often contribute to a student’s reluctance to engage in reading activities?

2. Do students who experience reading reluctance share similarities in their reluctance?

3. What are effective strategies teachers can utilize to engage reluctant readers?

**Handbook Goals**

The handbook, *Engaging Reluctant Readers in the 21st Century*, was created with two main goals in mind. The first goal of the handbook is to provide its readers with pertinent background information on the topic of reading reluctance. While many educators may have been in a situation where they experienced working with students reluctant to read, they may not have a holistic understanding of the issue. In these situations, teachers may have concerns or questions about reading reluctance and might be unsure of where to look for answers. It is hoped that after exploring the handbook, the reader becomes more knowledgeable on the topic of reading reluctance: what it might look like in a school setting, and how it might vary with different individuals.

The second goal of the handbook is to provide insight into the fourth guiding research question; what can be done? The bulk of the handbook was designed to share
ideas and strategies found within current research that encourage reluctant students to read and to challenge stereotypes as well. As a collection of strategies and ideas, this handbook allows teachers to apply new engaging ideas within their classroom practices to mitigate reading reluctance.

**Personal Relevance**

The motivation to undertake this research project to produce an educational handbook on the topic of reading reluctance was a result of my current and past experiences. Throughout my elementary and secondary school experiences, I had been largely reluctant to engage in reading activities. I remember doing everything possible to avoid anything that had to do with reading. I would not read books assigned in class, never picked up a book outside of school, and silent reading was a time when I’d sit and blankly stare at a page until it was over. This behaviour spanned from early elementary school until about grade 12. During my grade 12 year, I knew that I needed to read in order to meet the requirements of university acceptance. I also remember reading at a slower rate than many of my peers, which may have been a result of a lack of reading practice. This is one reason that I chose to focus my research efforts on reluctant readers.

Other personal experiences that have motivated my research in the area of reading reluctance were also found within the classroom, in the role of an elementary school teacher/volunteer. While volunteering in classrooms in Southern Ontario, teaching English overseas in South Korea, and teaching grade 6 in a fly-in community in Nunavut, I’ve experienced many students who are reluctant to read. My quest was then to set out to explore what current research has to offer on reading reluctance and what can be done to engage these students. Through this research experience, I hope to be able to better instill
a thirst for reading in my present and future students. Additionally, I hope to share my
findings with other teachers so they may also be able to better serve reluctant readers.

**Process of Research**

This paper and handbook are the result of the synthesis of current research and an
extensive literature review. The information, findings, study results, and suggestions
found in current research on reluctant readers have been discussed during this research
paper. Below, I will provide further details into the approach and process of research that
resulted in this paper and the handbook.

Initially, research into the topic of reluctant readers was selected as a result of
personal experience and interest. After discussing the topic with an advisor, guiding
research questions (noted earlier in this chapter) were formulated.

To begin acquiring current research on reading reluctance, many searches were
performed through online databases (e.g., Academic Search Premier, Scholar Portal E-
Journals, Google Scholar, Sage Journals Online, Academic Search Complete, ERIC).
During this stage of literature acquisition, keywords were used to search the databases,
including: reading reluctance; reluctant reader; reading motivation; reading engagement;
disengaged reader; reading resistance. All of the research papers and studies found
through these searches were saved electronically and printed out in hard copy. This
provided the initial information that would guide further searches later in the research
process.

I carefully read the literature obtained through the database searches and
highlighted all information pertaining to the nature of reluctant readers, the possible
factors that contribute to reading reluctance, and the proposed approaches to engage
students with reading. This lead to parallels between research becoming apparent; however, while there were commonalities between some of the research, each piece of literature offered new ideas and perspectives on reading reluctance. To obtain even more research on reading reluctance, online databases were utilized to ensure that as much information as necessary was gathered and analyzed.

**Handbook Structure**

The structure of the handbook needed to have important information suitable to help elementary school teachers (the primary intended audience) reach out to students who are reluctant to read. However, it wasn’t meant to be an exhaustive encyclopedia on the topic. Rather, it was designed to be a quick access, easily readable resource for teachers to have as a starting point of ideas to engage their students with reading. Based on the guiding questions of the research, the structure for the handbook, *Engaging Reluctant Readers in the 21st Century*, is divided into four main parts.

The first part of the handbook is the introduction. This section provides the reader with important background information on reluctant readers. The introduction explores the importance of reading during elementary school, the term reluctant reader, and some of the contributing factors of reading reluctance found in contemporary research. Additionally, the first part of the handbook includes the objectives and layout of the handbook.

The second part of the handbook contains insight into the five proposed reluctant reader profiles. Each profile includes a vignette to illustrate what that type of reluctant reader might look like in an elementary classroom setting. Accompanying each vignette
is additional information on the reluctant reader profile to provide a full understanding of how the profiles differentiate from each other.

The third portion of the handbook lays out the strategies that elementary school teachers may implement with students in their class who may be considered reluctant readers. Each of the strategies in this section of the handbook includes an overview of the strategy, what it looks like in a classroom, and is matched with the applicable reluctant reader profile(s) to better assist teachers seeking methods to aid reluctant readers.

The final part of the handbook includes carefully selected resources that teachers can use in the classroom to assist reluctant readers become engaged readers.
CHAPTER 4: THE HANDBOOK

The focus of this chapter is the handbook, *Engaging Reluctant Readers in the 21st Century*. The handbook was created to provide information on reluctant readers and to aid elementary school teachers who wish to support students who avoid reading. This handbook may be read cover to cover, or used for specific reluctant reader profiles or strategies. The handbook has three main parts: background information, strategies, and additional supportive resources.
This handbook is dedicated to all the teachers who work hard to share their love for reading with others.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Can Be Done?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant Reader Profiles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 1 – The Blue Reader</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 2 – The Yellow Reader</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 3 – The Green Reader</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 4 – The Orange Reader</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 5 – The Red Reader</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant Reader Strategies</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies by Profile</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Chart</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Building</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interest</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for Reading</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Talks</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Modeling</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Connection</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading with Technology</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Access</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of Reading Material</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Resources</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

“One of the most difficult problems that face teachers at classroom is the presence of students who do not want to read.”
(Al-Saleem, 2012, p. 1)

Reading is becoming nearly inseparable from life in the 21st century. Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik (1999) suggest that “adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history” (p. 99). However, in today’s classrooms reading and engaging with printed text is unappealing to many students. For the purpose of this handbook, the term reluctant reader will refer to any student who resists reading, regardless of the contributing factors at play.

The importance of engaging in reading activities and developing reading skills must not be underestimated, especially for students at the elementary level. Regular engagement with reading at this level has been linked to the further development of students’ identity and social and emotional wellbeing (Lenters, 2006), as well as improved academic performance across the curriculum (Churchwell, 2010). Students reluctant to read are missing out on these valuable benefits.

Contemporary research has provided insight into some of the contributing factors that deter students from engaging with reading. These contributing factors may not be limited to but include: cognitive/emotional factors (Earl & Maynard, 2006), reading ability (Boehm, 2009), cultural/attitude factors (Gambrell, 1996), motivational factors (Traux, 2010), and social factors (Clark & Osborne, 2007). It is also important to understand that the reluctance to read could be the result of multiple factors.
The factors that deter students at the elementary level give rise to different reluctant reader characteristics and traits. For example, some students do not engage in reading, even though their reading ability is very high, while others may be reluctant to read as a result of struggles with reading. Boehm (2009) suggests that specific clarification is needed when referring to disengaged or reluctant readers. For this reason, five profiles have been created to better understand and identify the behaviours of a reluctant reader.

**What Can Be Done?**

The purpose of this handbook is to share research based methods to engage reluctant readers at the elementary school level. It was constructed to aid elementary school teachers in their attempts to captivate disengaged readers and encourage them into a world of reading enjoyment.

Many researchers believe that teachers need to become aware of how to engage reluctant readers at an early age (Al-Saleem, 2012; Boehm, 2009; Earl & Maynard, 2006; Lenters, 2006; McKool, 2007; Traux, 2010). However, teachers may not be as aware of different approaches to engage middle grade reluctant readers in classroom settings.

This handbook presents information on the types of reluctant readers. A vignette for each is provided to help illustrate what different reluctant readers may look like in classroom settings. Next, strategic approaches are explored in order to help motivate these readers to embrace reading. Finally, this handbook includes additional resources that teachers may print out and use in their classroom to assist their readers, as well as to collect information on their students pertaining to reading and reading engagement.
Without some type of classification it may prove difficult to engage children with reading activities as a result of the overwhelming complexity of the issue, such as the multitude of contributing factors and engagement strategies to reading reluctance found in current literature. Assuming all students who do not wish to read fit into the same category would do little to specify the contributing factors that facilitate reading reluctance. This generalization may hinder strategic attempts to engage a student with reading.

To more accurately select effective strategies to engage students with reading, five profiles have been developed: the blue reader, the yellow reader, the green reader, the orange reader, and the red reader.

Each profile encompasses different traits when it comes to reading reluctance, allowing one to categorize a reluctant reader and better meet their needs. Following this page, the five reluctant reader profiles are explored through vignettes and descriptions. If a student exhibits the traits of any of the following profiles, they may in fact be a reluctant reader.
The Blue Reader

Dylan sat at his desk during silent reading again today with his book closed on his desk as usual. For one of the strongest readers in the class, it’s a rarity to ever see him open a book on his own. When he does, he just flips through the pages anyway. Even reading that is assigned for homework often does not get finished. Although reading comes so easy to him, he makes reading seem like such a chore.

Children who can read well but choose not to.

Many reluctant readers fall into this profile. They are the children who can read well, but are rarely, if ever, are found with a book in their hand or actively reading as a leisure activity. Brinda (2011) refers to reluctant readers that fit this profile as “someone who is capable of reading but chooses not to read” (p. 9). Similarly, Al-Saleem (2012) denotes these reluctant readers as “the child who reads well but has little interest in doing so” (p. 2). Students classified into this reluctant reader profile may be very intelligent and high achievers who do well in all areas of school, but lack the ambition or motivation to engage in reading activities.
The Yellow Reader

Sally loves it when the teacher reads to the class. She also seems really interested in the books that are in her classroom and school library. However, when it comes time to read on her own she often gives up after only a few pages. During a conversation with her father, her teacher learned that she enjoys getting new books, but struggles to read them and eventually stops trying.

Children who want to read but struggle.

Reluctant readers fitting this profile have difficulty with the process of reading. They may thoroughly enjoy books, magazines, comics, and other print-based materials but encounter frustration while reading that deters them from engaging with print based text. Al-Saleem (2012) refers to these students as intelligent, encompassing, and interested in reading, but do not read well. These students may love reading alongside another person who can assist them with their reading, but choose not to read as a leisure activity individually. While not all struggling readers shy away from print-based interaction, Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest “even a child who enjoys reading but is not as good as they would like to be can become a reluctant reader” (p. 166).
The Green Reader

Dwight avoids reading at all costs. Even when reading with him one on one, he shows little interests in the books, even when he chooses them. His teacher is worried because he is one of the weaker readers in his class and doesn’t seem to care about improving his reading skills. His parents also said that they never see him reading anything at home. He usually comes home after school and starts playing video games.

Students with little interest in reading and who experience difficulty.

This profile refers to students identified as reluctant readers who have little to no interest in engaging in reading activities and who also experience difficulty when reading. These students are those who evade reading at all costs and show little to no attempt or desire to strengthen their reading skills. Providing aid to these students may be the most challenging of these four profiles. Not only must a value and interest in reading be discovered, but also the student must simultaneously endure the struggles of building upon the skills necessary to become a proficient reader. These students may adamantly refuse to engage with print-based reading activities without providing reason.
The Orange Reader

*Catherine’s reading skills are a few grades lower than most other students in her class. Most of the time she says that reading is too hard for her and refuses to read in class. Her teacher learned that she reads sometimes at home when she is alone, but chooses to read books that she finds very easy. She won’t even try to read anything that is difficult to her.*

**Children who are reluctant to read due to emotional/learning barriers.**

Reluctant readers exhibiting this profile may be able to read and in fact enjoy reading. However, barriers may exist that prevent them from engaging with reading. Al-Saleem (2012) refers to children in this profile as those who may be dealing with specific learning problems/disabilities that hinder their willingness to autonomously engage in reading activities. To create a profile that is more inclusive, I argue that emotional barriers may also contribute to a student’s reluctance to read, as Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest that emotional and cognitive problems can hinder a child’s motivation to read, such as having little confidence in one’s reading ability. These students may seem interested in reading some days and do everything they can to avoid it others.
The Red Reader

Tyriq is a grade 5 student. However, it is hard to engage him with reading. He does well in most subjects but his teacher notices that he avoids reading when he can and says that it is pointless. During a conversation between his parents and his teacher, his teacher learned that Tyriq doesn’t have any books at home and that his parents don’t see the point in reading or encouraging their son to read. His teacher also learned from others in the school that Tyriq’s siblings don’t value or want to read either.

Children who are reluctant to read due to cultural factors.

Reluctant readers of this profile may not be engaging with reading activities as a result of the culture and the cultural norms of which they are embedded. Many researchers agree that a student’s willingness and perception of reading is highly influenced by their surrounding culture (Boehm 2009; Earl & Maynard 2006; McKool, 2007; Traux 2010). If a student experiences a culture, whether in the home, at school, or elsewhere, that does not place value on reading, they might adopt the perception that reading is not worthwhile or of importance. This may lead to children opting not to read and pursue other activities.
Found in the following section of this handbook are descriptions of divergent strategies that are aimed to engage reluctant readers. This information and collection of methods have been compiled to assist educators when confronted with reluctant readers in the classroom. It is hoped that educators will implement these methods within their classroom as a whole group and individually based on the needs of their students.

**Reluctant Reader Profile System**

Each of the proposed strategies has been matched with the different reluctant reader profiles suggested in the preceding section of this handbook. Some of the strategies have been matched to many reluctant reader profiles as it may be beneficial to more than one type of reluctant reader. The colour bar(s) that appear below the heading for each strategy corresponds to the type of reluctant reader the method may be most effective for.

Example:

The above bars represent a match with the “blue reader” and the “green reader”
Strategies by Profile

The Blue Reader

Motivation
Student Interest
Opportunities for Reading
Book Talks
Role Modeling
Literature Access
Choice of Books
Reading Culture

The Yellow Reader

Confidence Building
Opportunities for Reading
Book Talks
Personal Connection
Reading with Technology
Access to Books
Choice of Books
Guided Reading
Parent Involvement
The Green Reader

Confidence
Motivation
Student Interest
Opportunities for Reading
Book Talks
Role Modeling
Personal Connection
Reading with Technology
Literature Access
Choice of Books
Guided Reading
Reading Culture

The Orange Reader

Confidence
Motivation
Student Interest
Opportunities for Reading
Book Talks
Personal Connection
Reading with Technology
Literature Access
Choice of Books
Guided Reading
Parent Involvement
Reading Culture

The Red Reader

Motivation
Student Interest
Opportunities for Reading
Book Talks
Role Modeling
Literature Access
Choice of Books
Parent Involvement
Reading Culture
## Strategy Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Building</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interest</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for Reading</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Talks</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Modeling</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Connection</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading with Technology</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Access</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of Reading Material</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confidence Building

Confidence as a reader can have large implications on a student’s reading engagement and the enjoyment they derive from their reading experiences. Students who encounter difficulty during the reading process, whether it be decoding text or comprehending passages or vocabulary, may experience lower levels of confidence in their abilities. Earl and Maynard (2006) suggest that a student who lacks confidence in their reading abilities may utilize tactics to avoid reading activities. Additionally, “the more confident a reader is, the more he or she will choose to read” (Traux, 2010, p. 7).

One approach to increasing a student’s confidence in reading, suggested by Earl and Maynard (2006), is promoting creativity with words and having struggling readers play word games. They argue that these may create positive reading experiences and increase levels of confidence.

Another approach that can be taken to increase a reluctant reader’s confidence is the use of picture books in the classroom. Ivey (1999) suggests that encouraging the use of picture books allows struggling readers to read literature at their level without feeling inferior to their peers when it comes to their reading level.

Yet another confidence booster that reluctant readers may benefit from is creating a classroom environment that places high value on the process of learning. Guthrie and Davis (2003) suggest that students build confidence when they are awarded for learning as opposed to a mere focus on grades alone. Therefore actively recognizing a struggling reader’s progress in their reading abilities may increase their confidence as a reader.
Words Games for Reluctant Readers

Word games can be used to help students develop a variety of writing and reading skills, such as vocabulary practice and expansion, sentence structure, and word patterns. Word games are versatile and can be used with students of all grades and levels.

Types of Games

- **Word searches and crosswords**: Use subject-related vocabulary by making your own to reinforce learning!
- **Bananagrams**: Letter tiles that can be combined to make words.
- **Pairs in pears**: Develop memory and thinking skills while linking words.
- **Bingo**: Using sight words or vocabulary words, create a bingo game for class or small group use.
- **Scattergories**: Writing responses to questions, learn to read and respond under pressure.
- **Scrabble**: Letter tiles are placed to form words on a board, build words and gather points to win.
- **POP for Sight Words**: This game reinforces sight word recognition and improves fluency.
- **Boggle**: Take turns making words with a set amount of letters.
- **Magnetic Words**: Students can build silly sentences by sequencing magnetic words.
- **Word on the Street**: A fun team game that involves brainstorming words for specific categories.

Additionally, there are many great games that can be downloaded for the use on Smartboards, tablets, iPads, computers, and other electronic devices.

Using Word Games

- **Literacy centres**: You can have a few centre activities be word games. This will make literacy centres a fun time for reluctant readers while still helping them to develop language skills.
- **“I’m done”**: Use literacy games for students/reluctant readers who have completed work before others in the class. Playing a word game can help to make down-time a time to engage with text.
- **Recess**: Rave many word games available for indoor recess or play time.
- **Physical education**: Integrate word games into relay, team work, and running activities to help reinforce language skills in a fun setting.
When it comes to most activities, motivation plays a key role and reading is no different. Gambrell (2010) suggests that “students who are highly motivated to read will pursue reading, make time for reading, and develop the reading habit” (p. 14). It can then be argued that many reluctant readers experience a lack of motivation when it comes to engaging with reading activities. This idea is supported by Stringer and Mollineux (2003) as they suggest that the lack of motivation often drives and exacerbates reading reluctance. Therefore, to engage some reluctant readers, reading motivation must be established.

Reading motivation may be found in both intrinsic and extrinsic forms (Al-Hazza, 2010). One approach to instilling intrinsic motivation for a reluctant reader to read is to provide students with reading material based on their individual interests (Traux, 2010). It therefore may be beneficial for teachers to actively become knowledgeable of their students’ interests to better assist them select reading material they will enjoy and want to read.

In addition to student interest serving as intrinsic motivation, positive reading experiences may also serve as a form of motivation. For example, Demos and Foshay (2010) suggest that when peers share positive reading experiences, reluctant readers may be less likely to avoid reading activities.

Extrinsic forms of reading motivation also engage some reluctant readers. In a study conducted by Marinak and Gambrell (2008), students were more likely to read subsequent books when they received a proximal reward (in the case of the study, a book). They also argue that rewards that are proximal to the desired outcome are better motivators than arbitrary ones. Thus a rewards system established in a classroom that offers students the opportunity to receive a literature related token may foster enhanced motivation for certain reluctant readers.
Incentives Programs for Reluctant Readers

While intrinsic motivation to read may be the end goal for many teachers when working with reluctant readers, providing incentives for engaged reading is a great place to start. Setting up incentive programs that offer reluctant readers the chance to receive a proximal rewards for their reading efforts may just be the motivation they need.

Creating an Incentive Program for Reluctant Readers

1. Decide whether your incentive program will apply to all of your students, or only certain students who require further motivation.
2. For each student, you should have an idea of how many books/pages read or how long they need to be engaged in reading to achieve their reward. This goal should be discussed with the student so they are fully aware of what their reading goal is and how to reach it.
3. With the student, discuss appropriate rewards that are proximal to reading, such as a new book, book mark, extra reading time and ensure that the student knows what they are working towards.
4. Record the student’s reading in a chart that the student can check easily and understand. This can be done with a chart and dry-erase marker or a chart and stickers. It may also be done with the reading log sheet found in the additional resources of this handbook.
5. With the student, regularly check their progress towards their goal.
6. When the student has reached their goal, try to provide the incentive or reward as soon as possible and recognize their accomplishment. At the same time, work with the student to create a new reading goal that they may begin to work towards. This goal can be the same or different from the last, but should not be easier to reach.
7. This approach may allow students to enjoy their reading experiences.
One of the most important aspects of engaged reading is the students’ interest level in the material they are reading (Traux, 2010). Boehm (2009) suggests that some students become reluctant readers when they “have not found a book that is interesting to them” (p. 77). To engage reluctant readers with literature, it may then be necessary for their teacher to become well aware of their individual interests. A teacher who understands the interest of their students may offer more appropriate recommendations on reading material and activities that will captivate a reluctant reader's attention and draw them in as “children place great value on personal interest” (Park & Meyer, 2010, p. 39).

One method that can be utilized to better understand the reading interests of a student is a “student reading interest sheet.” To aid a study, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) constructed a student reading interest sheet. An adapted form of this sheet is found in the additional resources section of this handbook. This is a useful tool for students to share their reading interests at the individual level. Teachers can use these to provide intriguing reading material for any reluctant readers that may be in their class.

Another way to better understand student interest in reading material is through conversation and observation. Learning what a student enjoys outside of class may provide valuable hints to the reading material they might find interesting. Students who are often expected to read material that they do not enjoy or has little interest to them may become reluctant to engage in such activities (Stringer & Mollineaux, 2003).
Ways to Capture Student Interest in Reading

It can be easily understood that a student will be more keen to read if the reading material is of personal interest to them. There are several ways a teacher can work with their reluctant readers to gain a better understanding of what literature may engage them, some of these are described below.

Discovering a Student's Interest

- A student interest reading sheet (SIRS) is one method for understanding more about a student’s interest in reading material and their reading habits. This is a great way to many details about how a student views reading, especially if you are not yet familiar with the student. The information collecting from a SIRS can further guide the actions of a teacher helping a reluctant reader to find interest reading material. A SIRS can be found in the additional resources of this handbook.

- Helping reluctant readers find interesting books is another potential approach that can be used to increase reading engagement. Reluctant readers may not actively seek out texts about a topic that interests them. However, if a teacher understands a student's interests, through conversation, observation, etc., it is a great idea to take it upon themselves to find and provide reading material on that topic. Even a reluctant reader may engage with a text if they can learn about something they truly enjoy. Beyond books, a teacher may also introduce reluctant readers to multimodal texts and games that place emphasis on reading.

- Incorporating the interest of students in texts that a teacher uses in their subject lessons is another great way to spur engagement among reluctant readers. When selecting a text for use in a lesson, consciously choosing books that have a topic of popular interest with the students at hand may yield engaged reading and heightened attention. Finding common interest among many students is a good approach to ensure that you select texts that engage many students together.
If one wishes to engage a reluctant reader with reading activities, it is important to provide these students with sufficient time at school to read. It should not be assumed that children have regular opportunities to engage with reading material at home. According to Earl and Maynard (2006), “many children do not have the opportunity to read at home” (p. 165). With this in mind, how can teachers expect their students to become engaged and proficient readers if they are not given the necessary time to strengthen their reading abilities and connect with literature?

While a teacher may allow students to read throughout the day, implementing routine sustained silent reading (SSR) is one method a teacher can use to ensure students have opportunities to read. This also allows the teacher to observe which students may have difficulty engaging with text (Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2009). Found within the additional resources of this handbook is an observational checklist that may assist teachers identify reluctant and disengaged readers. Kelly and Clausen-Grace (2009) suggest that disengaged readers may also benefit from SSR. However, to ensure they are truly engaging with text, response activities, such as peer discussion or conferences with the teacher, can be used.

During SSR, a teacher may also want to assist students in small groups or individually to gain a better understanding of their reading abilities and to further support struggling or disengaged readers.
Providing Opportunities to Read

If having reluctant readers become engaged with reading is a goal, it makes sense then to offer them opportunities within the classroom to read. This reading does not necessarily need to be independent; there are many ways to provide students a chance to read every day.

Silent Reading Opportunities

- Allow a time every day for students to sit quietly and read, at their desks or elsewhere in the classroom.

- Incorporating this opportunity to read will ensure that daily reading becomes routine to all of your students, including reluctant readers.

- The time spent silent reading is up to the teacher, but allowing at least 15 to 20 minutes each day provides students time to become engage with their reading.

- During this time, the students should be allowed to read material of their choice. This literature may come from home, a classroom library, a book order, a school library, etc.

Shared Reading

- Reading as a class or in student groups each day will expose reluctant readers to an assortment of text types and different reading experiences in a social setting.

- There are many ways to integrate shared reading into your classroom, including the teacher reading (the teacher reads a text to the class while asking comprehension questions), partner reading (two students read a book together), reading buddies (pairing an older class of students with a younger class and have them read together), rotating student read-aloud (the teacher conducts a reading and has students read part of the text out loud).

- Shared reading in small groups of 3-4 students can provide low risk reading opportunities for students and may provide a more comfortable reading environment for reluctant readers that struggle with reading. This can be done by providing multiple copies of the same book for each group and allowing them to find a comfortable area in the classroom to read together.

- Shared reading can be done with any print material, such as picture books, guided reading books, poems, class novel sets, print outs, digital text, graphic novels, magazines, newspapers, etc.
A great method to engage students with reading is to give them the opportunity to discuss and share what they are reading with others (Gambrell, 1996). Students talking about books they read is also supported by Clark and Osborne (2007). From a study they conducted, they found that social interaction around reading material was found to be a positive influence on readers.

Ivey (1999) suggests that allowing students to discuss the books they are reading with peers is an effective approach to engage reluctant readers. Providing students with an opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts about what they have read can be an empowering experience. Having students share a book they read to the class does not have to take a lot of time either. One or two students sharing a day can not only provide them an opportunity to share the joys they experienced from reading, but also may spark interest in reluctant readers to engage with books recommended by peers. To assist teachers implement book sharing among their students, a sheet students may use to record information on a book they are reading has been included in the additional resources of this handbook.

Discussing what students read can also be done effectively in small groups in the classroom or by other means, such as a book club. Teachers can provide a group of students with similar reading levels copies of the same book to read and time to discuss how they felt about it.
Sharing the Reading

Allowing students, including reluctant readers, the opportunity to socially interact with their peers about what they are reading can have power benefits. This social interaction or sharing of reading experiences and material can be done in a classroom through many different approaches. The use of “reading response activities” or a “book sharing recording sheet” can assist students who want to share what they are reading with others. Below is a method that can be used to encourage students to share their reading.

Small Group Book Talks

1. Introduce students to the book sharing recording sheet found in the additional resources of this handbook. Ensure that the students understand the questions on it and how to use it while reading.
2. Allow students time to independently (if possible independently, with assistance if not) read a text of their choice.
3. While the students are reading their text, they should fill out the recording sheet with their thoughts on the book.
4. After the students are finished reading their book (or part of their book depending on the length) they should double check that their recording sheet is filled out.
5. The teacher can make small groups of 3 or 4 students (based on reading level or have the students choose their own).
6. In their small groups, the students will take turns sharing the book they were reading and how they felt about it.
7. The students are encouraged to use their recording sheet to help them include as much information as possible when they are sharing.
8. When each student in the group has finished sharing their book, the students will be exposed to new books that were selected or found interesting by their peers. This may inspire students to read a book they learned about from their peers in the future.
Teachers acting as strong role models can have great influence on their students. This understanding is also applicable to the attitude that students adopt towards reading activities. Traux (2010) suggests that “if teachers and other role models for reluctant readers enjoy and value reading, then these students will too” (p. 9). If this is true, then it may prove beneficial for teachers to exemplify a positive attitude and strong value for reading to engage their students, especially those identified as reluctant readers.

Gambrell (1996) argues that “teachers become explicit reading models when they share their own reading experiences with students and emphasize how reading enhances and enriches their lives” (p. 20). Thus, being an effective role model for reading means taking an active approach and sharing the value and benefits reading has to offer. Openly sharing a passion for reading may encourage and motivate reluctant readers to view reading as a favourable activity. In order to do this, however, Gambrell also believes that teachers need to be readers themselves.

Teachers should be encouraged to share their positive reading experiences and ensure that their students have chances to see them as an engaged reader. This, for example, can be done during instances of sustained silent reading. Teachers that take the time to model engaged reading to support their reluctant readers may persuade them to give reading a chance (Traux, 2010).
Modeling Engaged Reading

Modeling engaged reading is a great way to share the enjoyment and value of reading with reluctant readers. This can be done in different ways and at different times throughout the school day to allow all students to see their teacher as a reading role model. Below are some tips that teachers can use in their classroom to model engaged reading and show a value towards reading.

Tips for Modeling Engaged Reading

- **Talk about texts that you are currently reading.** Sharing with students books, news, magazines, or other literature that you are reading outside of the classroom is a good way to show students that you value reading in your life and that it is important.

- **Allow the students to observe you engaged in reading yourself.** A great time for this observation to occur is during instances of silent reading in your classroom. While your students are reading independently, read a book yourself to show that independent reading is also important to you as a teacher and adult. Additionally, it is a good idea to ensure that the students can easily see you when you are reading your book.

- **Provide opportunities** for your student to see or hear you talk favourably about a book you have read or are currently reading to other teachers or staff in the school. By doing this, you are modeling to your students ways to share positive reading experiences with peers.

- **If you include silent reading in your daily routine, stick to it.** Making sure that you are not replacing silent reading with other classroom activities or work shows the importance you place on time spent reading. If you regularly cancel silent reading, your students may interpret it as a lack of value towards reading.
Students who manage to find personal connections to material they are reading often become more engaged as Boehm (2009) suggests that “without this connection it is impossible for any reader reluctant or not to enjoy what they are reading” (p. 79). Brinda (2011) agrees with this and argues that assisting students find and maintain a personal connection with a text they read is essential for enjoyment to occur. However, there may be students who have a difficult time creating or finding this connection. For this reason, teachers who are aware of how to help these students establish a personal connection with books may mitigate some of the reluctance they might have to reading.

One method that teachers may wish to adopt, suggested by Feger (2006), is to model efficacious ways to create connections with a text and one's personal experience. She found that reading aloud to her students and using questioning strategies to make connections between the text and her personal life enhanced the reading engagement she experienced from her students. When students found relevant connections between a text and themselves it positively impacted their reading engagement.

Another way students may build connections between a text and their own lives is through reading response activities. Having a student provide written or oral responses to a text may encourage them to internalize events and characters in their reading material on a deeper level. In turn, this may cause connections between the reader and text to occur.
Connecting with a Text

There are several ways to help students connect with the texts they are reading. When students are able to make connections, learning becomes a rich experience. Here are some ideas that you can use in your classroom. Beyond these suggestions, including drama and the arts has also shown to build connections between the reader and text.

Text to Activity

- Have the students complete a Text to… activity each time they finish a book. To do this they will answer three questions or statements. Students can share and record their answers by writing, drawing, or talking. This strategy should be modeled many times and in many different ways.

  Text to Text:
  a. Can you relate this book to anything else you have read?
  b. Is there another text that has the same message?

  Text to Self:
  a. It reminds me of a time….
  b. Have you encountered a person/event that reminds you of…

  Text to World:
  a. It reminds me of something I saw on TV/internet/news…
  b. When I was reading online, I found something…..

Think Pair Share

- Think-Pair-Shares can be used to help generate ideas among students and get students talking about how the text relates to their lives. If students are having a hard time thinking on their own about how they relate to a text you can give them a leading question. An example of how to do this might be:

  1. After reading, give each student 5 minutes to think about something in the text that reminds them of their own life. You may want to give the students a leading question to assist them.
  2. Have the students pair with another student in the class.
  3. The pair of students can then share what happened in their book and how it was similar to something that they have experienced in their life.
Different forms of technology have permeated much of society in the 21st century. This has also become very evident in many of today's classrooms. It makes sense then that technology should be a viable option to pursue reading activities. Some researchers are in favour of the use of technology for reading purposes in the classes, such as Ertem (2013) through the belief that “many students find technology mediated reading to be very motivating and interesting” (p. 219). Miranda, Williams-Rossi, Johnson, and McKenzie (2011) also found that reluctant readers experienced higher levels of engagement and satisfaction reading through the use of e-readers.

The use of technology for reading purposes can offer new and exciting ways for students to interact with reading material. For example, utilizing technology can greatly enhance the access to reading material available to students, opportunities for students to select texts that appeal to their individual interests, and new ways to socially interact around text (Ertem, 2013). Online databases, such as readinga-z.com and www.raz-kids.com, offer a plethora of levelled books that students can access within their classroom.

To further engage students reading through technological means, teachers can have students socially interact around the online texts they have read (Ertem, 2013). Online forums allow for students to share their opinions and thoughts on the material that they have read and read what others have also posted. This not only may increase reluctant readers’ engagement to reading activities, but also allows them to provide and receive recommendations on similar text they might enjoy via online communities.
Technology Supported Reading

Implementing technology in the classroom is a great way to engage students and using technology for reading purposes is a great way to engage reluctant readers. There are many ways teachers can incorporate technology into their classroom for the intent of augmenting reading.

Forms of Technology

- **Computers** are a great form of technology that can be used to access a variety of reading programs and an eccentric variety of text types and topics of interest. There are also many websites that reluctant readers can engaged with that provide interesting, appropriately levelled, text choices. A few of these websites include:
  
  - www.readinga-z.com
  - www.raz-kids.com
  - www.wegivebooks.org
  - www.starfall.com

- **Tablets**, such as android devices of iPads, are other forms of technology that can engage and support students reluctant to read traditional books. There are many apps that are currently available that allow students to access a variety of different texts, word games, read alongs, and many different games involving reading. Tablets may also act as an e-reader, allowing the students access to books/newspapers/magazines that may be difficult to obtain in hard copy.

- **Audio Book Centres** are another great way to encourage reluctant readers to engage with reading if they encounter difficulty reading. Having books paired with audio allows students to hear what they are reading while following along with a book. One way to include this into a classroom is having a station in the classroom with a selection of audio books with their hard copy versions along with a set of headphones for students to use. Additionally, audio books come in a variety of levels for all readers and are great if internet or computers/tablets are not available.
Access to literature is of paramount importance if one wishes to engage a reluctant reader with reading activities. In fact, in a study conducted by Gambrell (1996), it was found that access to books in the classroom was a key feature that was associated with reading motivation. The importance can then be understood of teachers and schools supplying a vast array of reading material for their students, especially since, according to McKool (2007), students may not have access to much literature at homes.

A strategically arranged and organized classroom library may be an effective way to engage reluctant readers if the literature available is of their interest and reading level. Traux (2010) argues that “it would be very difficult to encourage reluctant readers to engage with text if the types of books they were interested in were not available” (p. 8). To assist teachers, a student reading interest sheet has been included in the additional resources. With the knowledge of their students’ interest, a teacher can both recommend and make high interest books accessible to their students, especially to students reluctant to read.

Another suggestion made by researchers to engage all readers is to provide access to multi-cultural books to students (Gangi, 2008; Landt, 2013). Landt (2013) proposes that teachers “must ensure that all students can find selections that reflect their families and their lives so that they have meaningful reading experiences” (p. 3). By ensuring all students, their culture(s), and their interests are represented in the reading material available to them, teachers can feel confident they are providing effective texts.
Making Texts Available

Readers may become reluctant if they do not have easy access to books that interest them or are at their reading level. For this reason, a teacher who ensures their students have access to an appropriate variety of reading material may find themselves with engaged readers. Below are some tips and guidance towards providing reading material to students.

Creating a Classroom Library

- Reading Material! Of course the foundation of a successful classroom library is the material that you will include in your library. The reading material that you choose to have in your classroom library should include texts that appeal to all students and text difficulty that span the reading abilities of the students. This requires a variety of different literature, such as a variety of literature on topics your students enjoy, technology augmented literature, and different forms of reading material (novels, picture books, expository texts, graphic novels, etc.).

- Organization is a key element of setting up an engaging and easy to use classroom library. Creating sections for different types of books and reading levels will help your students navigate the classroom library much easier. This ensures they find books that they are able to read and are of interest to them. Additionally, this organization can cut down on the time a student takes to select a book, leaving them more time to engage with it.

- Location is another important aspect of a classroom library. Creating a classroom library in a hard to reach location of the classroom does little to promote its access and the value of reading. A classroom library should be a prized attribute of a classroom that embraces reading. To ensure this, make your classroom library easily accessible to all students in the room.

If you would like to know more about setting up a classroom library, please visit: http://www.readingrockets.org/article/creating-classroom-library
There is evidence in research to suggest that allowing students to choose their own reading material has benefits (Gambrell, 1996; Moss & Hendershot, 2002). Gambrell (1996) found that students reported enjoying reading material more if they selected it themselves. In classrooms where students are not included in the selection of reading material, reluctant readers may not feel a sense of ownership when it comes to their reading experiences. Additionally, Moss and Hendershot (2002) found that allowing students choice in their reading materials “may be able to heighten motivation and deepen student engagement with text” (p. 7), both important aspects of removing reluctance to read among students.

There are a multitude of choices that teachers can offer reluctant readers when it comes to reading activities. Not only can teachers allow these students to select their own reading materials, but other choices, such as response activities and even where in the classroom to read, might allow further enjoyment from the entire text interaction. When it comes to students being involved in choices about reading, Marinak, Malloy, and Gambrell (2010) suggest, “Allowing young children to make even a minimal task choice can enhance subsequent interest in the activity” (p. 509).

Therefore, when it comes to attempting to engage reluctant readers with reading based activities, allowing them choice in the task or reading material may be enough to encourage them to participate. Positive experiences stemming from their own personal selection of text might also make way for future reading endeavours.
Letting the Student Choose

When it comes to reading, student choice may create or engage reluctant readers. For this reason, encouraging students to become active participants in their reading activities is a great idea to increase engagement and ownership of their reading experiences. Below are some tips and suggestions teachers can use to incorporate student choice in the reading that takes place in the classroom.

Tips for Letting Students Choose

- Provide guidance, but also choice, during independent reading time.
- Let the students choose what reading medium they will engage with (if available in the classroom).
- Allow students to choose texts for response activities or other subject-based activities requiring a text.
- Encourage students to choose more than one book at a time from the classroom library to cut down on time spent switching books.
- Provide a choice of reading response activities that students can complete.
- During instances of silent reading, allow students to choose where in the classroom they want to read independently.
- If shared reading or paired reading is part of your routines, allow the students to select who they may want to read with.
- If possible, the students can vote on when the class will spend time reading in groups, partners, or independently. For example, most students in your class may have a preference for reading in the morning or afternoon.
- While reading with the class, allow students to choose whether they would like to participate in reading out loud or to just listen and follow along.
- For all of the above, ensure that students know and use the “Goldilocks Approach” to choose texts that are not too easy or too hard.
Guided Reading

Guiding readers through the reading process may be quite effective for students who struggle with reading and are therefore reluctant to engage with it. The foundation of guided reading, according to Lyons and Thompson (2012), is providing leveled texts, small group instruction, and teaching effective reading strategies. Teachers who directly support their students during reading activities, instead of leaving them to read independently, may in fact help the reader avoid some of the struggles they would encounter if left to read on their own, such as visualization and imagery struggles (Al-Hazza, 2010; Stringer & Mollineux, 2003).

As Al-Hazza (2010) explains, “guided imagery is usually done by verbally describing a unique setting that will prepare students for the story they are about to read” (p. 65). By supporting students in such a way, they may become more immersed and engaged in the reading material, especially for nonfiction texts requiring students to visualize different environments.

Additionally, when it comes to engaging and motivating reluctant readers, guided reading may serve as an important tool. A study conducted by Lyons and Thompson (2012) suggest that through guided reading sessions “teachers and teacher assistants reported student progress in reading as well as increases in student confidence, engagement, and motivation” (p. 163). Not only can guided reading provide opportunities for reluctant readers to become engaged readers, it also helps struggling readers become more proficient readers, reducing their frustrations and negative experiences when participating in reading activities.
A Guided Reading Lesson

A well implemented guided reading program can benefit reluctant readers and students of all reading levels. If a reluctant reader struggles with reading texts independently, guided reading is a great method to assist them engaging with text in a small group setting. Ideally small reading groups of 3-4 students can be made based on their reading level and ability.

An Approach to Guided Reading

1. Read the title of the book with the students.
2. Invite the students to go on a “picture walk,” where they look at all of the pictures and pages in the book and guess what the book will be about.
3. Ask the students a question to help them activate prior knowledge and increase engagement with the text. For example, if the book was about dogs you could ask “Does anyone have a dog at home?” and then you could encourage talk about dogs. This step may draw in reluctant readers.
4. Reading. Students can read the guided reading books independently (asking for help when needed), as a group or chorally, and each student could take turns with chunks of the text (the other students following).
5. After the students have read the book, ask comprehension questions about the book to ensure they retained what they read and clarify anything they did not understand.
6. Word work should be done during reading and after reading to ensure all students understand the proper pronunciation and meaning of any new words they encountered. Word work can be done prior to reading if there are many new and tricky words.
7. Re-read the book in partners or independently and solve fluency and word problems.
8. Writing. To further the experience, it may be a good idea to have the students complete a writing activity related to the book.
Parent Involvement

Parents are an essential component of a student’s education and learning process. They may also be a valuable aid in removing reading reluctance from their children. Traux (2010) argues that parents can set strong examples and be positive role models for reluctant readers. However, it is also argued that if a parent does not promote a value for engaging in reading activities, there is an increased probability of the child devaluing reading as well (Earl & Maynard, 2006).

One recommendation that can be made to a parent is to read aloud to their child. Al-Saleem (2012) suggests that “the importance of reading aloud cannot be overemphasized. By reading aloud to children, parents are emphasizing the joy of reading, introducing them to new vocabulary words and ideas, expanding their knowledge, and learning more about their interests” (p. 3).

An additional engagement strategy involving parental input is encouraging parents to have their child read to them in their home and to take interest in what they choose to read. While parents may be busy, it is crucial for them to support and show interest in the reading habits of their child, especially if they are identified as a reluctant reader. Padak and Potenza-Radis (2010), agrees with the criticality of parental involvement in a student's reading development and further suggests that it may be a good idea to provide a range of appropriately leveled reading materials that the child finds interesting. In addition to this, a parent could keep a log sheet of the books their child is reading to them at home.
Preparing Parents

Parents are an important element of a child’s reading habits. With this in mind, any help provided to a parent to actively encourage a reluctant reader to engage in reading is very worthwhile. Below are some tips and approaches you can use to help prepare parents to work with their child towards reading engagement.

**Tips for Getting Parents Involved**

- **Communicating** regularly with parents about their child’s reading habits and/or reluctance to engage with reading is important. Open communication is a great way for both the teachers and parents to understand a child’s reading habits inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, any progress made with reluctant readers can be shared and celebrating among the teacher and parents. This communication can be done via phone calls, notes home with the student, inviting the parents into the class, e-mails, etc.

- **Providing resources** to parents equips them with materials that may assist them in developing their child’s reading habits. Encouraging parents to borrow a few books to read with their child, helping them set up an in-home reading routine, and providing them with reading strategies provides parents an opportunity to help engage their child.

- **Encouragement** may not only be important for the student, but also for the parents. Sharing the importance of reading regularly at home and encouraging parents to model this importance helps parents show that reading is not a school exclusive activity. Parents may also be encouraged to take an active interest in what sort of material their child is reading in their leisure time and in school.
Classroom Culture

It is important for students, regardless of whether they are identified reluctant readers or avid readers, to be immersed in a classroom culture that supports and values reading. Gambrell (2010) argues that “The role of the teacher in creating a classroom culture that supports and nurtures reading motivation cannot be over-estimated” (p. 14). Additionally, Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009) suggest that this culture should extend beyond the classroom as students “need an atmosphere where new book titles are enthusiastically shared and where spontaneous book talks occur during lunch, on the playground, or after the weekend” (p. 316). With this understanding, it should be a priority for educators to consciously strive towards such a classroom setting and reading culture for their students. However, how can one create an effective reading culture within their classroom?

Gambrell (1996) shares insight into some of the necessities to create an engaging and motivating reading classroom culture for students; she suggests the following: the teacher must become an explicit reading model, construct a book rich environment, provide opportunities for student choice, allow students to interact socially with others, provide opportunities to become acquainted with a variety of different types of books, and provide appropriate incentives proximal to reading tasks.

When teachers share a classroom culture with their students that embraces reading as an enjoyable and exciting activity, reading as a leisure activity may become more acceptable to reluctant readers and reading engaging may ensue.
Tips for Creating a Reading Culture

Creating a classroom atmosphere that emphasizes the value and joy of reading can be done with a few strategies and a lot of consistency. Here are some approaches to creating a classroom culture that is conducive to engaged reading.

**Place Value on Reading**

- Engage your students in quiet reading every day at the same time. If quiet reading is missed due to a school function make sure it still happens at some point during the day.

- Integrate reading into all subject areas when possible. Switch between reading aloud, silent reading, shared reading, guided reading, and substitution reading to keep reading fun.

- Have your school participate in a reading program such as Drop Everything And Read (DEAR). When the whole school reads at the same time students understand that reading is important no matter where you are in the school.

**Classroom Set-Up**

- Having a reading corner with comfortable chairs and/or pillows as well as reading prompts will place emphasis on reading in your classroom. Students will want to spend time in the reading corner and teachers can use it in various ways to help motivate student reading and reluctant readers.

- Ensure that there are many high interest books in this reading corner that the students have access too. Having a great variety and stock of books may communicate the importance you have on reading to the students.

Having all students support each other is one of the best ways to build a supportive atmosphere among your students and readers. When students respect each other and the adults in the classroom they are able to support one another’s strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. With a supportive classroom attitude students will not pick on other students who are weak or reluctant to read.
Found in this section of the handbook are additional resources that may be printed to assist teachers engage students with reading.

**The following resources have been included:**

- silent reading engagement checklist
- student reading interest sheet
- student reading log
- book sharing recording sheet
### Silent Reading Engagement Checklist

Directions: Use this tool to tally students’ behaviors while reading independently. Data collection should occur during two or three reading sessions to identify students having difficulty engaging.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Out of seat</th>
<th>Continually looks up/around room</th>
<th>Flips pages/not reading</th>
<th>Talks</th>
<th>Switches books</th>
<th>Total # of off-task behaviors observed</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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(Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2009, p. 315)
Student Reading Interest Sheet

Student name: ___________________ Grade: ______   Date: ________________

1. What reading activities do you enjoy most? (you may check more than one)
   ___ teacher reading out loud
   ___ students reading out loud
   ___ silent reading (to yourself)
   ___ reading with the whole class
   ___ reading plays or poetry out loud
   ___ book discussion groups
   ___ class novels
   ___ other (explain) ________________________________

2. What makes you want to read in class?
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________

3. What makes you **not** want to read in class?
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________

4. How do you find the books you read?
   ___ the classroom
   ___ the library
   ___ a bookstore
   ___ from home
   ___ friends
   ___ the teacher
   ___ other (explain) ____________________________________
5. What types of books do you like to read?
   ____ novels/chapter books
   ____ mysteries
   ____ fantasy
   ____ science fiction
   ____ history
   ____ books about people your age
   ____ scary stories
   ____ other (explain) _______________________________
   ____ picture books
   ____ poetry books
   ____ information books
   ____ sports
   ____ animals
   ____ science
   ____ history
   ____ other (explain) _______________________________
   ____ magazines
   ____ newspapers
   ____ comic books (graphic novels)
   ____ other (explain) _______________________________

6. How often do you read at home?
   ____ often      ____ sometimes    ____ never

7. What is your favourite book? _______________________________

8. Where do you like to read most? _______________________________

9. How often do you see your friends/family reading?
   ____ often      ____ sometimes    ____ never

Adapted from Ivey and Broaddus (2001)
# Student Reading Log Sheet

Student name: ________________  |  Grade: ______

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book #</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date Started</th>
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(Thompson, 2015)
Book Sharing Recording Sheet

Student name: _______________  Grade: ______  Date: ____________

Title of the book: ________________________________

Author: _______________________________________

Why I chose this book: __________________________

The characters in the book are: __________  __________

                   __________  __________
                   __________  __________

The setting of the book is: _______________________

What happened:

  In the beginning ________________________________

                   ______________________________________
                   ______________________________________
                   ______________________________________

  In the middle ________________________________

                   ______________________________________
                   ______________________________________
                   ______________________________________

  In the end ________________________________

                   ______________________________________
                   ______________________________________

My favourite part of the book: _______________________

(Thompson, 2015)
References


Engaging Reluctant Readers in the 21st Century

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CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The main focus of this research project was to explore the topic of reading reluctance in children (grades 4-6) and to develop a handbook that may aid elementary school teachers with engaging students in their class with reading, especially students who are identified as reluctant readers. To provide elementary educators with an understanding of the problem at hand, the introduction of the handbook covers important information for teachers to understand and become familiar with. This information includes: (a) defining reading reluctance; (b) exploring the importance of reading and developing strong reading skills during childhood and adolescence; (c) suggesting some of the contributing factors that may deter students from engaging with text; (d) identifying student profiles for those who may in fact be reluctant readers; and (e) providing approaches to engage students with text and reading activities. These suggested methods are based heavily in contemporary research. The methods are not laid out in a lesson plan format, as there are numerous ways one may approach each strategy. However, the methods provide the handbook’s audience with ideas of what may be done to assist their students as opposed to how it may be done. These methods are also matched with suggested reluctant-reader profiles to further specify efficacious engagement strategies for individual needs.

Finally, the handbook provides additional resources that teachers may use freely with their students. These resources range from an engagement checklist to a recording sheet that students may use to help them discuss a book they are reading.

Reading Reluctance Summary

This research project has explored many facets of the relationship between students and reading; the main area of exploration for this research being the engagement
and lack of engagement students have when it comes to reading. Early in the research process, the term “reluctant reader” was identified in previous research and established to refer to one who is resistant to engage in reading activities, regardless of the reason(s) for the resistance. An important finding and consideration that must be stressed is that reading reluctance is not necessarily the result of poor academic or reading ability (Boehm, 2009). Research has shown that there are several reasons why one may avoid reading; these reasons represent a large portion of the findings of this research and have been referred to as “contributing factors.”

Another finding of this research are the multitude of contributing factors that are at play, often not in isolation, that deter students from actively engaging with reading activities. These contributing factors may not be limited to but include: cognitive/emotional factors (Earl & Maynard, 2006), such as low self-confidence when it comes to reading ability (McKool, 2007); reading ability, such as struggles with visualizing what is being read (Boehm, 2009); cultural/attitude factors (Gambrell, 1996), for example the culture and attitudes toward reading in a student’s home (Earl & Maynard 2006); motivational factors, for instance undervaluing the development of sound reading skills (Traux, 2010); and social factors (Clark & Osborne, 2007), such as a lack of encouragement to read by peers (Merga, 2014). Each of these factors has been documented in recent research as both evident and problematic in 21st century classrooms. The many contributing factors of reading reluctance have resulted in reluctant reader profiles that are divergent in their characteristics.

Reluctant Reader Profiles

Reading profiles have been offered to help teachers identify students that may be
reluctant to engage with reading and to narrow in on the contributive factors driving the reluctance. As students are individuals, the teacher’s understanding of their reluctance to engage in reading activities needs to be individualized. It should be stressed that these profiles are just examples of how the reluctant behaviours might be played out for students and that I am not trying to fit students nicely into particular profiles. At the same time, by creating the sample vignettes and profiles, teachers might be able to draw upon the strategies offered in order to engage/re-engage their students with reading.

While researchers have alluded to a few of the proposed profiles, such as Al-Saleem (2012) and Brinda (2011), a list of five profiles have been identified through this research project:

1. Children who can read well but choose not to engage in reading activities.
2. Children who want to read but struggle and become resistant.
3. Students with little interest in reading who are not strong readers.
4. Children who are reluctant to read as a result of emotional/learning barriers.
5. Children who are reluctant to read due to cultural factors.

This profile system, vignettes, and descriptions have been implemented into the handbook to assist teachers become familiar with the divergent nature of reluctant readers. These findings may help shape understandings and perceptions, as well as pedagogical practices of reluctance in relation to reading.

**Engagement Strategies for Reluctant Readers**

The most important goal of this research project was to identify research based methods to assist elementary school teachers engage reluctant readers with reading activities. Through an analysis of both primary and secondary research, 13 efficacious strategies have
been identified, organized, and examined in the handbook (chapter 4 of this major research paper). The methods and strategies for reading engagement that have been included in the handbook are: confidence building; motivation; student interest; opportunities for reading; book talks; role modeling; personal connection; reading with technology; literature access; choice of reading material; guided reading; parent involvement; and classroom culture.

Educators can choose to implement these strategies in isolation (i.e., one strategy at a time) or in combination of each other (i.e., two or more strategies at once).

Each of the strategies that have been identified and included within the handbook have been suggested and recommended by multiple researchers. The 13 strategies for engaging students with text have already been suggested in literature, and by no means is this list exhaustive. New strategies are being developed and offered all the time. Nor is this list of strategies appropriate for all students; as mentioned previously reading is an individualized experience for each child and situated contexts are always fluid and diverse. That said, there is a need for such a resource. To my knowledge, an easily readable resource such as the one I offer here—one that is based in a solid literature review of researched studies and theories and that offers specific reader profiles—has not been compiled in an educational context. Furthermore, the strategies that have been listed and described in the handbook are offered as a collection of ideas for educators to provide a foundation for reading engagement among all of their students and to guide their practices when it comes to classroom reading endeavours.

**Implications for Educators**

The findings of this research project have given rise to implications for educators, specifically elementary school teachers (grades 4-6). For example, this research may
influence the perception that teachers have towards students that are resistant to read. In other words, all reluctant readers cannot be viewed as one in the same. This research has explored and presented the ideology that reluctant readers have divergent characteristics and factors that contribute to their reluctance to read. The idea that “once you have met one reluctant reader, you have met one reluctant reader” must be accepted if one wishes to truly engage them with reading. Disregarding the differences among reluctant readers does little to effectively understand what may in fact motivate them to give reading a chance. While this research offers only five reluctant reader profiles, it explores a few foundational steps to a wider understanding of students who demonstrate reluctance with reading.

Another implication for teachers is the importance of creating a classroom culture that embraces reading and encourages reading in an engaging manner. From the findings of this paper, educators are encouraged to adopt an active focus on reading enjoyment and engagement among all of their students, reluctant to read or not. There is much research suggesting the importance of reading and developing reading skills during a student's elementary school years. Unfortunately, there is also research suggesting that reading attitudes and enjoyment decrease over this period as well (Sainsbury, 2004). Understanding and effectively implementing reading engagement strategies found in the handbook of this research paper may help educators instill reading enjoyment among their students and create a culture within the classroom that values reading as an activity.

From this research, it can be well noted that reluctant readers may be found in any classroom. It then can be argued that teachers should be aware of the behaviours of reluctant readers and how to implement strategies within the classroom the engage them
with reading. During my years in university focusing on teacher education, I have taken many literacy and language arts courses, both required and optional. However, I did not experience any focus on learning how to assist students that are resistant to read. I believe that new teachers may find this a valuable asset in their skill set and foundational knowledge as they embark to teach literacy to their students. Equipping new teachers with strategies to engage reluctant readers with texts may prove beneficial to the start of their career and the students they work with.

**Next Steps for Reluctant Readers**

The findings of this research suggest that it is possible to take steps towards full literacy engagement. An awareness of the prevalence of reluctant readers in 21st century classrooms may be what is needed to reorganize literacy programs to accommodate these students. Reading programs need to be created that are inclusive to all students and provide each student a chance to explore their interest through text and advance their reading abilities in an enjoyable manner.

One way to move forward in classroom reading programs is to structure literacy education to employ the strategies found in the handbook of this paper. Implementing these strategies in the classroom on a daily basis may be the preventative measure needed to ensure that we as educators are not creating reluctant readers but engaging each student in a world of literature. Following the proposed strategies also allows for new teachers to create a classroom culture that holds a high value for reading amongst the students.

Additional research into reading reluctance may be necessary to build upon and refine the strategies that have been included in the handbook of this paper. Further research into each strategy and how to most efficaciously implement them may be of
great assistance to new teachers as well as those well into the profession. Pursuing research in the area of media text and multi-modal text for reading engagement has become of interest to me from what I have learned through this research experience. A new guiding question for future research may be: How does reading via technological mediums affect reading engagement among elementary students?

**Concluding Remarks**

As a former reluctant reader myself, I have taken a keen interest as an elementary school teacher to share the value and enjoyment of readings with my students. While reluctant readers are unique in their individualism and the contributing factors that deter them from engaging with reading activities may be vast and complex, it should be a primary goal for teachers to encourage and engage these students with text-based activities. The benefits that can result from an appetite for literature, sound reading abilities, and a shared culture of reading are innumerable. However, to accomplish this daunting task, we must educate ourselves on the variety of approaches that may be taken to engage reluctant readers and create a classroom culture that hold reading in high regard.
References


