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LITERACY HABITS OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

A Thesis by

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Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2007

Submitted to the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders
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the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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LITERACY HABITS OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

The following faculty have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommended that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communication Sciences and Disorders.

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Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
-Robert Frost

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ABSTRACT

Literacy continues to be important during the secondary school years; however, during middle school motivation to read is known to decline (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moss & Hendershot, 2007; Pitcher, et al., 2007; National Institute for Literacy, 2007). There is little research on how adolescents spend their free-time and less research regarding types of preferred literacy related activities (Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen, 2005). Less is known about differences in urban or rural communities. The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent sixth graders in an urban and rural public school differ in their preferred types of literacy activities, amount of time spent engaging in literacy activities, and the effect of time spent doing homework on leisure reading.

Participants were 78 students from urban and rural sixth grade classes. Data were collected using a multiple choice survey constructed to obtain information about student's free-time activities as they relate to time spent engaging in literacy activities and homework.

Results indicated that urban students spent more time reading for fun than the rural students and girls spent more time reading for fun than boys. There was not a significant difference in the amount of time students spent on homework and reading for fun. All students indicated a high preference for magazines. Additionally, urban students preferred comics while rural students preferred non-fiction materials. Also, boys preferred comics and internet articles while girls preferred novels and nonfiction materials.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Children learn to read in elementary school. Results from the National Reading Panel (2000) show that phonemic awareness training helps children to decode novel words and remember how to read familiar words. Beginning in fourth grade and continuing through middle school and high school, students read to learn. There is an increasing amount of independent academic work which requires reading assigned to these students as well.

“Literacy plays an important role in the development of language during the school-age and adolescent years” (Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen, 2005, p 93). While reading, children encounter between 15,000 and 30,000 new words each year. If the amount of time children spend reading is increased, it could become the single most powerful way of promoting large-scale vocabulary growth (Nagy & Herman, 1987). Continued language development contributes greatly to academic and vocational success, as well as to personal satisfaction through life (Nippold, 2007).

As students are reading to learn the information needed for school, literacy requires the interdependence of reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Muth, Durbin, & Glynn, 2004). However, students are expected to learn this advanced level of literacy in decontextualized situations without explicit instruction (Alvermann & Wilson, 2007). Middle school students are beginning to make many of their own decisions and form their own opinions, including opinions about school and the significance of school to their future.

“To become engaged in an activity, individuals must be motivated to become involved” (Swafford, 2007, p160). However, motivation to read declines during middle school (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moss & Hendershot, 2007; Pitcher, Albright, et al., 2007). While

motivation to read in school may decline, outside of school, students may read magazines and surf the internet (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). Understanding what types of reading materials middle school students are motivated to read can aid in improving reading instruction and help speech-language pathologist's (SLP) to provide appropriate intervention methods.

“Spoken language provides the foundation for the development of reading and writing” (ASHA, 2001, p2). It is the role of SLP's to provide prevention, identification, assessment, and intervention for children of all ages who are at-risk for reading and writing problems (ASHA, 2001). Understanding the literacy habits of middle school students is critical to making appropriate recommendations in public school settings (Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen, 2005). Unfortunately little is known about the reading interests of middle school students.

Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen (2005) surveyed sixth grade and ninth grade students in the same public school to determine the leisure activities these students preferred. This study did not consider differences in the resources available in urban and rural communities or the amount of time that was spent doing homework.

The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent sixth graders in an urban and rural public school differ in their preferred types of leisure time activities, including literacy related activities, amount of time spent engaging in literacy activities, and the effect of time spent doing homework on leisure reading. In addition, information was gathered regarding the types of materials urban and rural sixth grade students like to read for fun.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

“Literacy is the ability to use reading, writing, listening, and speaking to learn, think critically, and solve problems” (Muth, Durbin, & Glynn, 2004, p.107). The term ‘literacy’ is usually associated with academics; however, literacy extends beyond textbooks. Various forms of communicating are equally valid and useful in given situations, making academic literacy only one type of literacy (Alvermann & Wilson, 2004). Literacy skills are critical to success in school and across society. Currently education goals are centered on literacy performance from preschool through high school.

For school-age children, their source of language input expands beyond spoken language to include written language. As children begin to use their reading skills to learn new and more complex vocabulary, utilize critical thinking skills, and process complex sentences, their language development becomes increasingly individualistic. In middle school and high school students are allowed to choose their coursework and extracurricular activities. In addition to these choices, student’s friends contribute to their “development of linguistic individualism.” This phenomenon makes it difficult to establish firm guidelines on later language development (Nippold, 2007).

The purpose of this chapter is to present the rationale behind the present study through a review of literacy development and significant articles regarding the literacy habits and motivation for reading of middle school students.

Literacy Development

Children’s experiences with print before entering school are referred to as emergent literacy. In many homes books are read to children before they turn one year old. These children

are exposed to print in various places fostering curiosity and excitement for learning to read. Joint book reading is the most structured literacy event these children experience before entering school (Kamhi & Catts, 2005). Exposure to print can support knowledge bases, build vocabulary, and contribute to the development of verbal intelligence through reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991). Some experts (Chall, 1983; Frith, 1985) have described reading development in stages. In the logographic stage children begin to make associations between spoken words and the graphic features of printed word. For example, children recognize the McDonald's sign and logo but do not understand that the word on the sign says McDonald's. During the phonetic stage, children start to read words through sound-letter associations and then become able to visually recognize words. In the orthographic stage, words are read automatically without the need to phonologically decode.

As children move from the emergent literacy phase into the first and second grade they begin to read words by using letter-sound correspondence rules and phonological production abilities to sound out single words. Comprehension is limited because attention is focused on decoding. Fluency increases by the end of the second grade and continues through the fourth grade as decoding becomes more automatic, allowing the student the ability to comprehend the text. By the end of fourth grade and continuing through eighth grade, students begin reading to learn and comprehension skills become more complex as they advance through school (Paul, 2007).

Reading in Middle School

Middle school students have been stereotyped as apathetic, reluctant readers with negative attitudes and resistance toward reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). The transition from elementary school to middle school is very complex for students. Aside from the physical

changes adolescents experience, cognitively they begin thinking more abstractly. The methods that are used to deduce right and wrong change as they mature, as well as their self-image and interactions with peers (Muth, et al, 2007). Motivation and interest in reading begin to decline through middle school and continues through the high school years (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moss & Hendershot, 2007; Pitcher, et al., 2007).

School work also changes as students transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Reading becomes the primary tool for learning the meanings of new words (Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen, 2005) and becomes a task critical to success in school. Students encounter 10,000 or more polysyllabic new words, a year in their grade-level and content-area texts starting in fifth grade and continuing through school (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). While school reading is critical to vocabulary development, leisure reading is important as well because it allows students to learn vocabulary that is specific to their interests and hobbies.

Studies of Leisure Reading Habits

Middle school students have many choices in leisure activities such as recreational sports, computer and video games, the internet, and movies to list a few. Although reading is often a leisure activity for young children and adults, less is known about the leisure reading of adolescents. Leisure reading is defined as the reading students choose to do on their own (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). Leisure reading is not limited to reading books but includes text in a variety of formats and genres: newspapers, magazines, and internet articles. In a study Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) found that when students choose to read independently, their effort, motivation, and attitudes toward reading increase.

Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) surveyed 584 adolescents in a low-income, minority, urban middle school about their leisure reading habits. Seventy-eight percent of females reported

reading for pleasure. Preferences included realistic fiction, mystery, and fantasy. Sixty-four percent of boys reported reading for pleasure and they preferred adventure and action-oriented fiction and nonfiction. Both girls and boys showed a strong preference for magazines. Students reported that they read the most after school or at night. Fifty percent reported reading constantly and 22% reported reading when they get a chance. However, despite those reports, the students' reading scores remained low. The authors questioned the types of leisure reading materials the students chose and their correlation with higher levels of literacy.

For this study, a 20-question survey divided into 16 multiple choice and 4 open-ended questions was utilized. The questions focused on adolescents' reading in their free time and reasons why they read these types of materials. Questions were not asked about other activities that students may participate in as leisure activities. The survey was administered by the teachers at the request of the school librarian. This could have biased the students' responses, positively or negatively, since the teacher was administering the survey for the librarian.

Greensburg, Gilbert, & Fredrick (2006) surveyed the reading interests and behaviors of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in an inner-city and rural middle school. There were approximately 70 miles between the two schools and demographics were similar. Both reading interest and reading behavior was surveyed. Reading interest was determined by asking students to rank their interest in reading scenarios such as "I like reading a book on a rainy Saturday." The students ranked their answer on a 1-4 Likert scale according to their reading interest. Reading behavior was determined through four questions asking about time spent reading specific materials the day before taking the survey (e.g., "How many minutes did you spend reading comics yesterday?"). A similarity between the two schools was that sixth grade females reported a higher interest in reading. A higher interest in reading was reported for the inner-city

sixth grade students than any of the other groups. While inner-city students showed more interest in reading and engaged in more reading activities than the rural students, neither group showed a significant interest in reading, each reading for less than 15 minutes per day.

These results were the students' self-reported perceptions and behaviors towards reading. The questions on the survey may have been too specific and the survey itself limited the materials that the students may enjoy reading to books, comics, mail, newspapers, and magazines. Less is known about reading materials students chose to read or their use of electronic reading resources.

Studies of Reading Motivation

Krashen (2004) reported that voluntary reading will not produce high levels of competence by itself but will provide a foundation so that higher levels of proficiency may be reached. Students' motivation contributes to their reading habits. Pitcher, et al. (2007) and the National Institute for Literacy (2007) define motivation as the beliefs, values, needs, and goals that individuals have. These traits regarding the topics, methods, and results of reading affect students' motivations to read. Motivation can be divided into two forms, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is an external form of motivation and is usually associated with tangible rewards such as grades or privileges. Intrinsic motivation comes from within an individual and is related to the satisfaction a person gets from engaging in a task (Swafford, 2007). Self-efficacy and autonomy are components of intrinsic motivation. Students who feel competent and determined when attempting a challenging text are more likely to complete it because they have the skills necessary to do so. When students have experienced success with reading tasks, their intrinsic motivation increases.

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) surveyed 1,765 sixth grade students in both urban and rural school settings to determine reading motivation in the classroom. Results included information about what students valued most from their reading and language arts classes, and what motivated reading. Regarding reading activities valued in the classroom, 63% of students preferred free reading time and 62% preferred when the teacher read books aloud. Finding good materials to read and having choices in selecting these materials were motivators for the largest number (42%) of students. Extrinsic motivators, including rewards and specific activities, were incentive for 23% of students. Other people were motivators for 19% of students. When asked about their favorite things to read at school 38% favored novels the most. Textbooks were only preferred by 7% of the students. Fifty-nine percent of students reported reading in school daily or often.

When asked about their favorite things to read at home none of the choices received high interest. Of the highest, 19% of students preferred magazines and 13% preferred novels. Textbooks were reported by 1% of the students as the best thing they read at home. Their preferred genre was mystery/horror (19%). Sixty-eight percent of students reported reading daily or often at home. The students reported that when reading at home they were reading to learn more about topics of individual interest.

Ivey and Broaddus conducted interviews of 31 students to follow up on survey results. Interview responses differed from survey results in one area; reading motivators. More students (29%) reported that the teacher was a motivator compared to only 11% of the students indicating the teacher was a motivator on the survey. When these students liked the books assigned in class, they were motivated to read them. This survey focused on preferred reading activities at school, where students find their books, and preferences in reading materials. Information was gathered

about reasons why the student's read at home but not specifically about the leisure reading habits of these middle school students.

Nippold, et al. (2005) surveyed middle school students' leisure activities, especially activities that were literacy-based (e.g., cooking, email). They conducted a study to determine the free-time preferences of sixth and ninth grade students in one school. Equal numbers of boys and girls were asked to complete a survey during class. The most popular activities for all the students included watching television or videos (81%), listening to music/going to concerts (74%), playing computer or video games (70%), and playing sports (69%). The least popular activities for all the students included arts and crafts (44%), cooking (35%), writing (32%), and running or walking (29%). Results also show that boys preferred watching TV or videos, playing computer or video games, and sports while girls preferred watching TV or videos, shopping, and listening to music. Reading was a preferred activity by 58% of boys and 70% of girls. No interactions between gender and grade were statistically significant.

This study does not account for differences that possibly exist between different size communities, instead the focus was on one school. Time spent on homework and assigned reading was not accounted for as affecting the amount of time these students spent on leisure reading.

Moss and Hendershot (2002) conducted a two year ethnographic study of a sixth grade classroom during the addition of nonfiction trade books to the student's classroom book choices. Moss, the classroom teacher, alternated reading a fiction book and a related nonfiction book aloud to the class to increase exposure to nonfiction print. For example, the fictional *Titanic Crossing* (Williams, 1997) and the nonfiction book, *Exploring the Titanic* (Ballard, 1988) were read to the class. Students offered their opinions about the assigned small group reading and their

preferences in voluntary reading in multiple contexts (i.e., journal entries, group discussion, and interviews) for the purpose of data collection for the study. Results showed six categories of factors for the student's reasons for choosing books: "I wondered," visuals, authors and intertextuality, knowledge of book awards and genre, personal connections, and other readers. Seventy five percent of students chose books because of a personal need to learn about a topic (I wondered). Students also selected books because of visuals in the book and on the cover (48%) and knowledge of nonfiction authors from books and films (40%). Twenty nine percent of students chose books based on the following two reasons: book awards and genre and a connection between the text and the student's experiences. Peer recommendations were reported by 27% of students as a reason for selecting books. The majority of students reported that having choices in their reading, especially choices that were not limited to fiction, was a "critical motivator" for them.

Pitcher, et al. (2007) modified the Assessing Motivation to Read profile, which was intended for younger children, to include adolescents, which resulted in the Assessing Adolescents' Motivation to Read. The profile has two parts: a survey followed by an interview of randomly selected students. Discrepancies in the student's responses emerged between the surveys and interviews. Students' views of themselves as readers was different in school and out of school. For example, one student viewed himself as a poor reader in school after being enrolled in English for summer school but during an interview he expressed his interest in various authors, including Michael Crichton. The students defined reading exclusively as an academic activity. It is possible the students did not see value in the reading they did outside of the classroom or consider multiliteracies such as internet sources, magazines, or newspapers as genuine sources of literacy. Students reported that their family members were influential in the

types of books they read, usually getting books and magazines from them for gifts. Discussing newspaper articles with parents or reading to younger siblings were also reported as being an influence from the family. All the students in the study valued assignments that gave them a choice in the topic and format.

School Reading

School reading differs significantly from out-of-school reading. Textbooks, which are expository literature, do not follow a predictable pattern of events the same way that novels do. Informational texts incorporate visual and graphic information with the written text. Understanding these texts requires the ability to predict and identify the key organizing frameworks (Ogle, 2003).

Homework is defined as tasks that are assigned by teachers and are meant to be completed outside of school. Marzano and Pickering (2007) report that research has supported the efficacy of homework; it increases achievement because it extends learning beyond the school day. Beginning in sixth grade, homework should play an important role in increasing the student's scores on standardized tests (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Results of Corno and Xu's (2004) empirical study of student's homework experiences at various grade levels found that middle school students assume more personal responsibility for homework assignments and begin to understand that completion of homework gets them further along in school. The amount of homework that students receive increases throughout the school years. Marzano and Pickering (2007) suggest using the "10-minute rule" which states that all combined daily homework assignments should take about as long to complete as 10 minutes multiplied by the students grade level. However, time should not be the focus of the teacher when assigning homework because it is possible to miss the purpose of the assignment (Marzano & Pickering, 2007).

Homework Motivation

Xu (2005) found that approximately 75% of students in grades 5 through 12 completed homework for intrinsic reasons as opposed to extrinsic reasons. Intrinsic reasons included to develop a sense of responsibility, work independently, learn study skills, develop good discipline, and reinforce school learning. When students valued these reasons, they were less likely to attend class without completed homework. Extrinsic reasons were to gain approval from the teacher, parents, and peers. Forty six percent of students completed homework to gain teacher approval, 41% to gain family approval, and 28% to gain peer approval. There was no relationship between extrinsic reasons for completing homework and likelihood to attend class with completed homework. Girls were more likely to report doing homework for intrinsic reasons regardless of family involvement. Boys that reported family involvement with their homework were more likely to report intrinsic reasons for doing homework than those boys who did not receive family help with homework. The author reported small effect sizes for both boys and girls in comparison to family homework help.

Gender

Gender is socially constructed in relation to those around us, not simply a biological entity (Blair, 2007). Sociocultural practices are different for boys and girls so it makes sense to conclude that their preferred literacies will differ as well. Cavazos-Kottke (2005) reported an anecdote about a boy who became an avid reader of science fiction but a teacher's attempt to expand his reading interests resulted in him quitting reading completely. While this may seem extreme, similar stories are not uncommon. Boys view school definitions of literacy as excluding their preferred types of reading materials (Blair, 2007). Many boys who choose to read materials other than books do not view themselves as reading.

Society has labeled certain genres “boy books” and “girl books” and schools have been encouraged to balance their book selections accordingly. Fifty eight percent of male sixth grade students and 70% of female students in the Nippold, et al. (2005) study reported reading as a free time activity. Comics, novels, and magazines were materials that male students preferred. It is possible comics may not be included in most library settings. Female students preferred novels, magazines, and short stories. Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) reported similar findings: males preferred adventure and action oriented fiction and nonfiction while females preferred realistic fiction, mystery, and fantasy books. Sixty eight percent of males and 76% of females expressed a strong preference for magazines. In the Greensburg, Gilbert, and Fredrick (2006) study, males showed less interest in reading than their female peers.

Sullivan (2004) described role model differences in boys and girls. The author reported that each group more readily identified with members of the same sex in terms of reading preferences. For example, women are more likely to read books while men are more likely to read newspapers or brief, informative texts

Although gender and reading preferences have been studied, less is known about gender and time spent reading for fun or gender as it relates to leisure and homework. Furthermore, fewer studies have investigated gender comparisons in rural and urban settings.

Statement of the Problem

During the middle and high school years reading becomes the primary modality for gaining information in school; however, interest in reading declines throughout these years. There is little research on the leisure reading interests of adolescents or other possible activities that could be competing for their time. Community and family influences could be a vital factor

in the resources available and personal value seen in reading. The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent boys and girls in the sixth grade in an urban and rural public school differ in their 1) preferred types of leisure activities, including literacy related activities, 2) amount of time spent reading for fun, 3) time spent doing homework on leisure reading, and 4) types of preferred reading materials sixth graders.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Participants

Participants were (19 males and 31 females) sixth graders from one classroom in a Midwestern metropolitan public middle school and (14 males and 14 females) sixth graders from a rural public middle school 75 miles away. These schools were chosen because of similar demographics. The urban middle school had 930 students enrolled; 60% of the students were white, non-Hispanic and 40% of the students were from minority ethnic groups. Thirty nine percent of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged. The rural middle school had 187 students enrolled; 70% were white, non-Hispanic and 30% from minority ethnic groups. Forty six percent were classified as economically disadvantaged. After meeting with the principals from both schools, two classrooms were selected as participants. Parent/Caregiver Informed Consent forms and a cover letter detailing the project were sent home with the students (see Appendix A) and returned to the teachers.

Survey Instrument

Data were collected using a multiple choice survey constructed to obtain information about student's after school and weekend activities as they relate to time spent engaging in literacy activities and homework. The survey followed a model from a previous study by Nippold, et al. (2005) who surveyed sixth and ninth grade students. Nippold (personal communication, January 29, 2008) granted permission via email to use the survey developed for her study.

Pilot Survey

Four sixth grade students, a girl and boy from urban and rural middle schools not in the study, were asked to participate in a pilot study to determine the effectiveness of the survey. They were given the survey and asked to comment on or make additions to the options on the survey in order for the investigator to learn about the opportunities available to this age group in both communities. Information from the pilot study was used to construct the survey.

Experimental Survey

The survey consisted of 16 questions: 13 multiple choice questions and 3 Likert scale questions (see Appendix B). Of the 16 total questions data were gathered from six of the questions for the purposes of the present study: one question about free-time activities, one question about types of preferred reading materials, two questions about time spent reading and doing homework, and two questions about preferred types of fiction and nonfiction materials. Directions were provided in each question for students to circle one answer or as many as apply. The questions were constructed to obtain information about the students' choices of free-time activities, types of fiction and nonfiction materials they preferred, and where they obtain their reading materials. Questions were also asked about the amount of time they spent reading for fun and doing homework. Time values were labeled numerically (1- less than 30 minutes; 2- 30-60 minutes; 3- 1-2 hours; 4- more than 2 hours). Questions about the types of movies the students enjoy were added as foil questions so the students did not perceive the survey as academic or only about reading.

Reading Vocabulary Instrument

A list of twenty-seven real words and nonwords used in a study by Cunningham and Stanovich (1991) were administered to determine reading vocabulary knowledge and

homogeneity of groups. The students completed this task immediately following the survey. Directions were given to the students not to guess, only to check the words they know are real words (see Appendix C).

Procedure

The survey and reading vocabulary list were administered by the co-investigator at the urban middle school during the students' English class and took approximately fifteen minutes to complete. For logistical reasons, written instructions were given to the classroom teacher at the rural middle school, and she administered the survey. All students in both settings were given an assent form/survey packet. The students were asked to sign the assent form indicating their willingness to participate (see Appendix D). All students completed the surveys in order to keep each student's decision to participate or not confidential. Surveys of the students who choose not to participate and those whose parents did not agree to participation were not included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Statistical differences were determined by computer assisted descriptive statistics, *t* tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 15. Comparisons were made between sixth grade students preferences in free-time activities, including potential literacy activities, in the urban and rural schools as well as by gender. Additional comparisons were made between time spent reading for fun and homework.

CHAPTER IV

Results

There were three purposes for this study of 6th grade students' literacy habits. The first purpose of this study was to determine whether or not sixth grade girls and boys in an urban and a rural public school differed in their leisure activity preferences, and specifically, how they differed in preferred literacy activities. The second purpose was to identify any relationships between school community and gender in time spent in leisure reading. The third purpose of this study was to determine the effect of time spent doing homework on leisure reading. Additional data were gathered to compare materials chosen to read for fun, as well as preferred types of fiction and nonfiction.

A vocabulary assessment was included in the survey to determine the homogeneity of groups. The scores for the urban students ($M = 35.74$, $SD = 2.55$) were similar to the scores for the rural students ($M = 34.18$, $SD = 6.67$). The difference was not significant, $t(31.5) = 1.19$, $p = .24$ (two-tailed).

Free-Time Activities

The first research question was: is there a difference between types of free-time activities preferred by urban and rural sixth grade students? Both groups rated listening to music on IPOD/CD's (Urban 76%; Rural 89%) and participating in group sports (Urban 80%; Rural 75%) highest. More students from the rural community rated hanging out with friends (89%) and watching TV/movies (68%) as most preferred free-time activities. Sixth graders from the urban community indicated a high interest in shopping and playing computer and video games. Both groups rated reading as a solo activity similarly (Urban 38%; Rural 36%). The urban students

least favored activities were 4-H (10%) and individual sports (12%). The rural students least favored activities were the Boys and Girls Club (7%), 4-H (14%), and individual sports (14%).

Other free time activities which were potentially literacy related were rated similarly between the two groups: texting (Urban 40%; Rural 43%), cooking (Urban 48%; Rural 46%), and computer/video games (Urban 72%; Rural 68%). However, there was more than a 10% difference between groups in two other literacy related activities: instant messaging (Urban 26%; Rural 39%) and creative writing (Urban 22%; Rural 36%) (see Appendix D).

When the groups were divided by gender, both groups rated listening to music on IPOD/CD's (Boys 85%; Girls 78%) as the highest preferred activity. Both groups rated playing group sports (Boys 82%; Girls 76%) and hanging out with friends (Boys 76%; Girls 76%) similarly. More girls rated shopping at the mall (82%) as a preferred free-time activity than the boys (55%). The girl's least favored free time activity was remote controlled (RC) cars (9%) and the boys least favored free time activity was playing individual sports (11%).

Other free-time activities that were potentially literacy based included playing computer or video games (Boys 79%; Girls 64%), texting (Boys 30%; Girls 49%), and instant messaging (Boys 36%; Girls 27%). Differences of more than 10% were found for the activities playing computer or video games and texting. Reading was rated higher for the girls (42%) than for the boys (30%) (see Appendix E).

Reading for Fun

The second research question was: is there any relationship between school community or gender in time spent reading for fun. Time values were labeled numerically (1- less than 30 minutes; 2- 30-60 minutes; 3- 1-2 hours; 4- more than 2 hours) for the analyses. An independent-

sample t test revealed that urban students read significantly more than rural students, $t(69.6) = 2.55, p = .013$ (two-tailed).

When the groups were divided by gender, the girls reported spending more time ($M = 1.9, SD = 1.1$) reading for fun than the boys ($M = 1.5, SD = .91$). An independent-sample t test evidenced that girls spent significantly more time reading for fun $t(75.01) = 2.004, p = .049$ (two-tailed).

Reading for Fun and Homework

The third research question was: is there a relationship between the time urban and rural students spent doing homework and reading for fun. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated to determine the amount of time urban and rural students reported reading for fun and doing homework. Time values were labeled numerically (1- less than 30 minutes; 2- 30-60 minutes; 3- 1-2 hours; 4- more than 2 hours) for all analyses. Table 1 illustrates mean time differences for urban and rural students. When comparing reading for fun and doing homework, Type III Sums of Squares was analyzed for between subject effects because of unequal group sizes. The differences among the means are not statistically significant $F(3, 70) = .06, p = .77$.

A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated on the amount of time boys and girls spent doing homework compared to reading for fun. Time values were labeled numerically (1- less than 30 minutes; 2- 30-60 minutes; 3- 1-2 hours; 4- more than 2 hours) for all analyses. Table 2 illustrates the mean time differences for boys and girls. However, the differences between the means on homework and reading for fun are not statistically significant $F(3, 70) = .66, p = .49$.

TABLE 1

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF REPORTED READING FOR FUN TIMES BY
COMMUNITY AND TIME SPENT DOING HOMEWORK

Homework time	Urban			Rural		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
>30 minutes	1.89	0.58	27	1.57	0.59	23
30-60 minutes	1.60	0.55	5	1.00	—	1
1-2 hours	1.92	0.95	13	1.67	0.58	3
>2 hours	1.40	0.55	5	1.00	—	1

Note: Dashes indicate that the standard deviation was not calculated because of the single subject in the group.

TABLE 2

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF REPORTED READING FOR FUN TIMES BY
GENDER AND TIME SPENT DOING HOMEWORK

Homework time	Boys			Girls		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
>30 minutes	1.72	0.68	25	1.76	0.52	25
30-60 minutes	1.67	0.58	3	1.33	0.58	3
1-2 hours	2.33	0.58	3	1.77	0.93	13
>2 hours	1.50	0.71	2	1.25	0.50	4

FIGURE 1

COMMUNITY: HOMEWORK AND READING FOR FUN

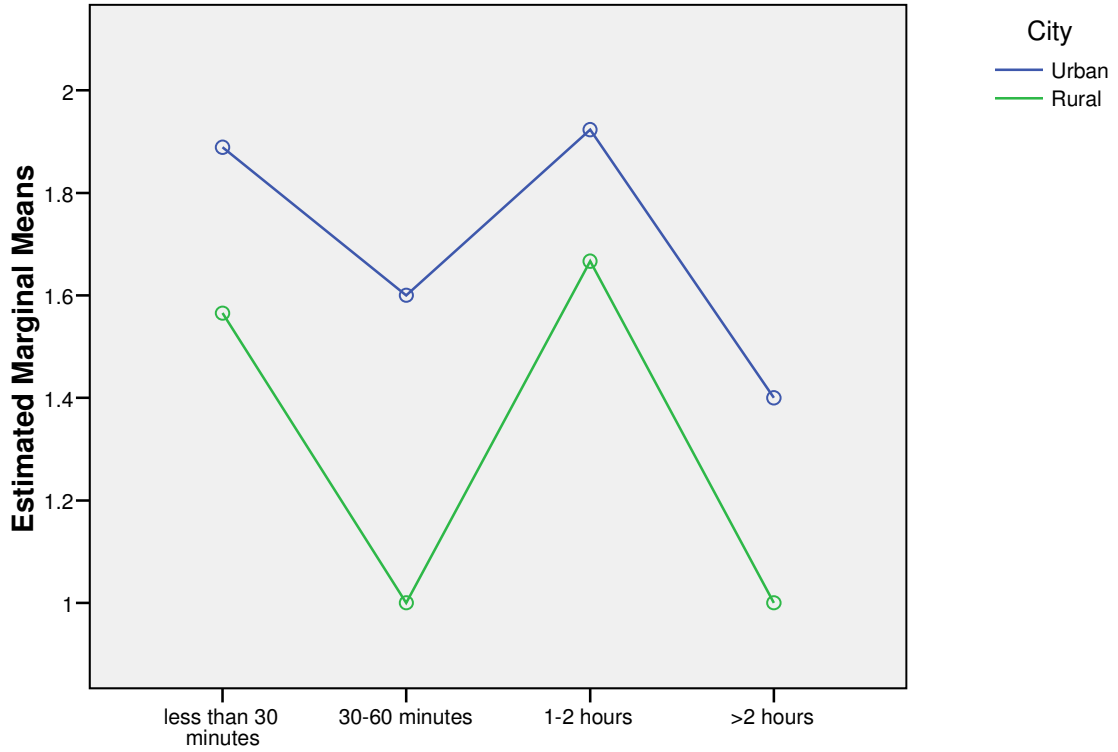
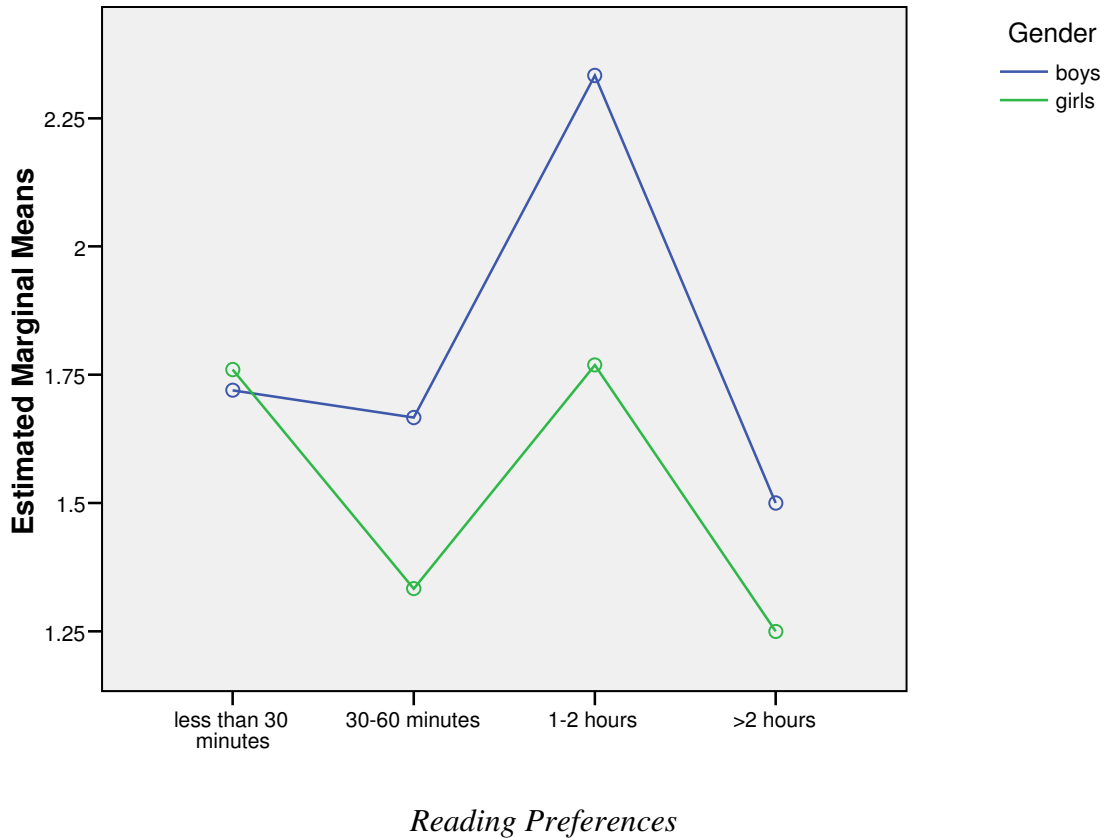


FIGURE 2

GENDER: HOMEWORK AND READING FOR FUN



Preferences in Reading Material

The fourth research question was: what types of reading materials do sixth grader students prefer to read. Students were asked what kinds of materials they liked to read for fun. Both urban and rural students preferred reading magazines (Urban 44%; Rural 46%), nonfiction books (Urban 32%; Rural 36%), and comics (Urban 46%; Rural 29%). Students from the rural community reported liking novels (29%). The least preferred types of reading materials for both communities were newspapers (Urban 8%; Rural 4%) and plays (Urban 8%; Rural 7%).

The data were grouped according to gender to determine what gender differences exist between preferences in reading materials. Both boys and girls preferred magazines (Boys 39%;

Girls 49%). The girls preferred novels (42%), and non-fiction books (42%). Boys preferred reading comics (58%), and articles from the internet (30%). The least preferred types of reading materials for boys and girls were newspapers (Boys 6%; Girls 7%) and plays (Boys 0%; Girls 13%).

FIGURE 3

PREFERRED READING MATERIALS AND COMMUNITY

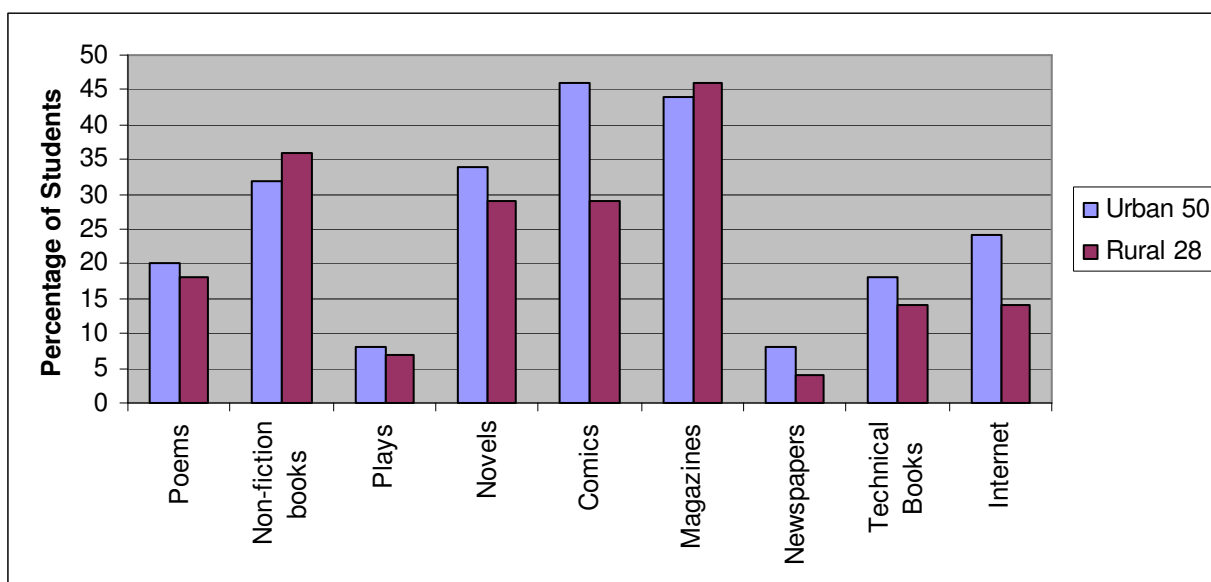
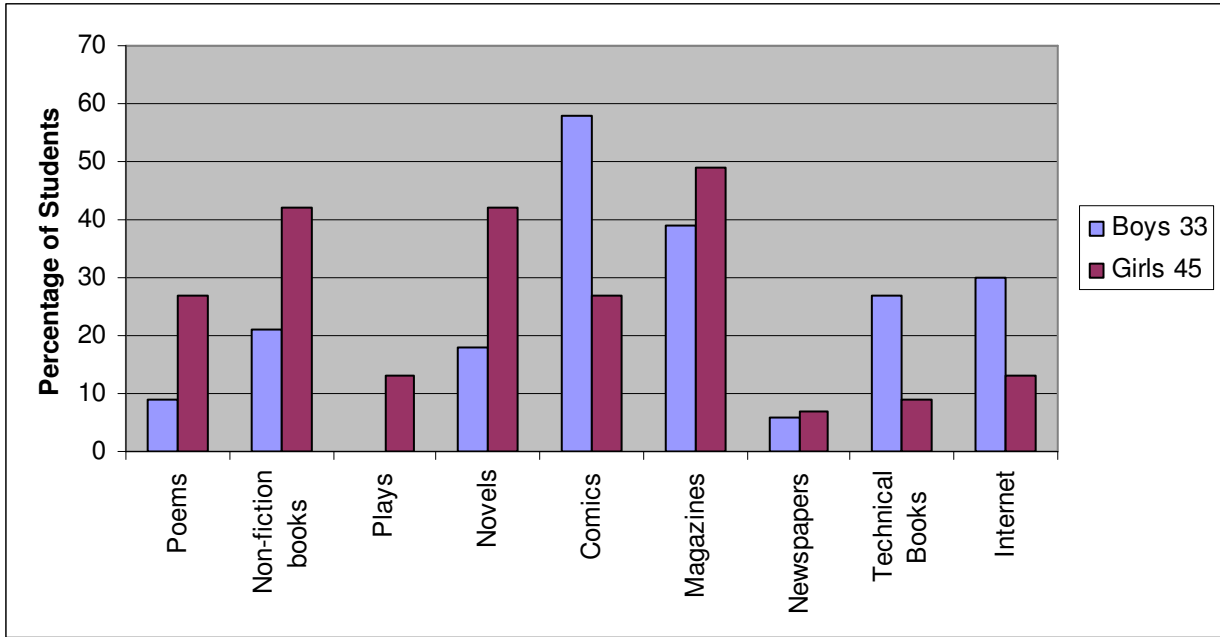


FIGURE 4

PREFERRED READING MATERIALS AND GENDER



Preferences in Types of Fiction

The students were asked to report on their preferred types of fiction materials. More students from both communities preferred reading mysteries (Urban 66%; Rural 79%), adventure (Urban 60%; Rural 57%), and humor (Urban 64%; Rural 50%). Students from the rural community also reported liking fantasy (50%). Science fiction was the least preferred type of fiction by the urban students (16%) while romance, history, and science fiction were the least preferred types of fiction by the rural students (21%).

When data were grouped according to gender, both boys and girls preferred adventure (boys 67%; girls 53%) and mystery (boys 54%; girls 82%). In addition, girls preferred fantasy (53%) while boys preferred humor (73%). The boys least preferred type of fiction was romance (6%) and the girls least preferred type of fiction was science fiction (11%).

FIGURE 5

PREFERRED FICTION AND COMMUNITY

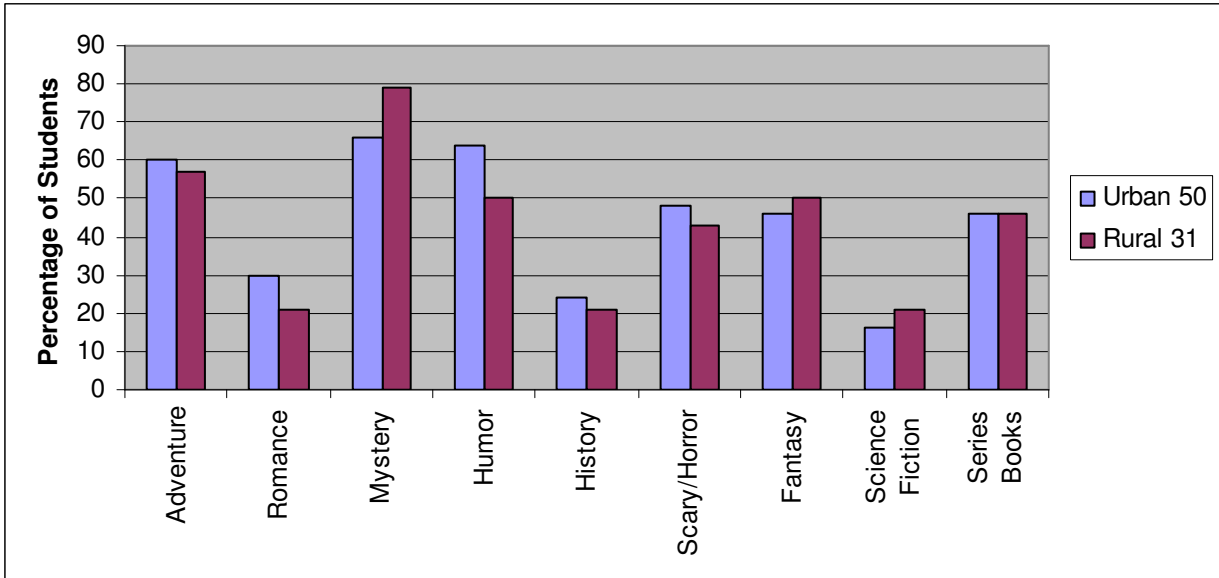
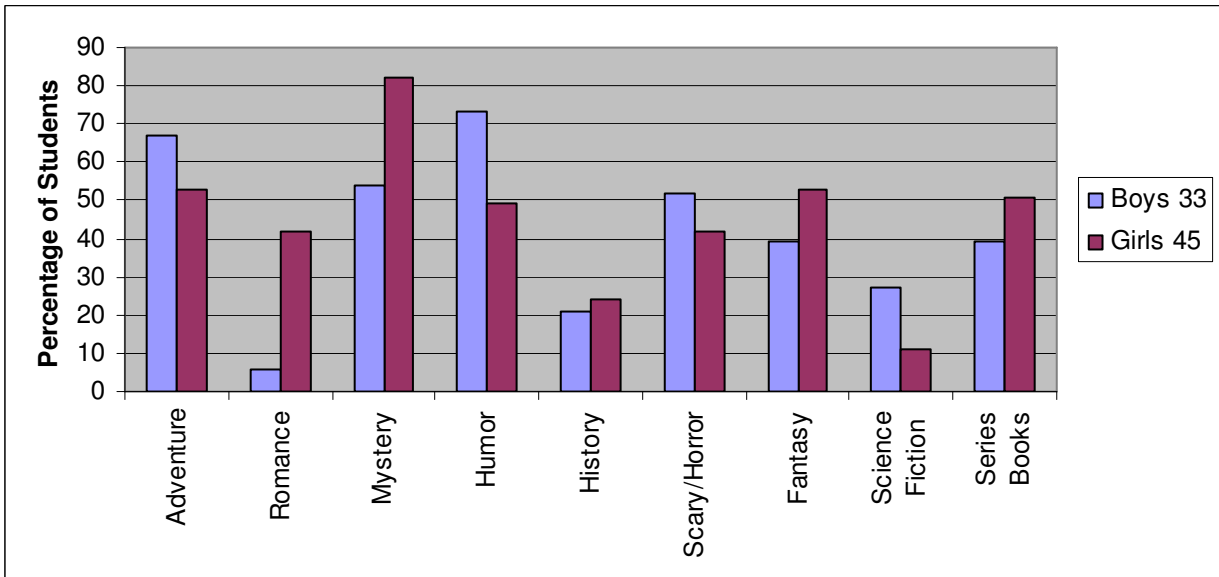


FIGURE 6

PREFERRED FICTION AND GENDER



Preferred types of Nonfiction

The students from both communities reported the types of nonfiction materials they preferred were about sports (Urban 60%; Rural 54%) and animals (Urban 54%; Rural 43%). Students from the urban community reported liking history materials (38%), while the rural students reported liking science materials (36%). The least preferred types of nonfiction materials were textbooks (Urban 2%; Rural 4%).

Data were analyzed to account for gender differences. Both boys and girls preferred animals (Boys 33%; Girls 62%), sports (Boys 76%; Girls 44%), and history (Boys 33%; Girls 33%) materials. Additionally, boys preferred science materials (42%). Textbooks were also the least preferred type of nonfiction reading material when data were grouped according to gender (Boys 0%; Girls 4%).

FIGURE 7

PREFERRED NONFICTION MATERIALS AND COMMUNITY

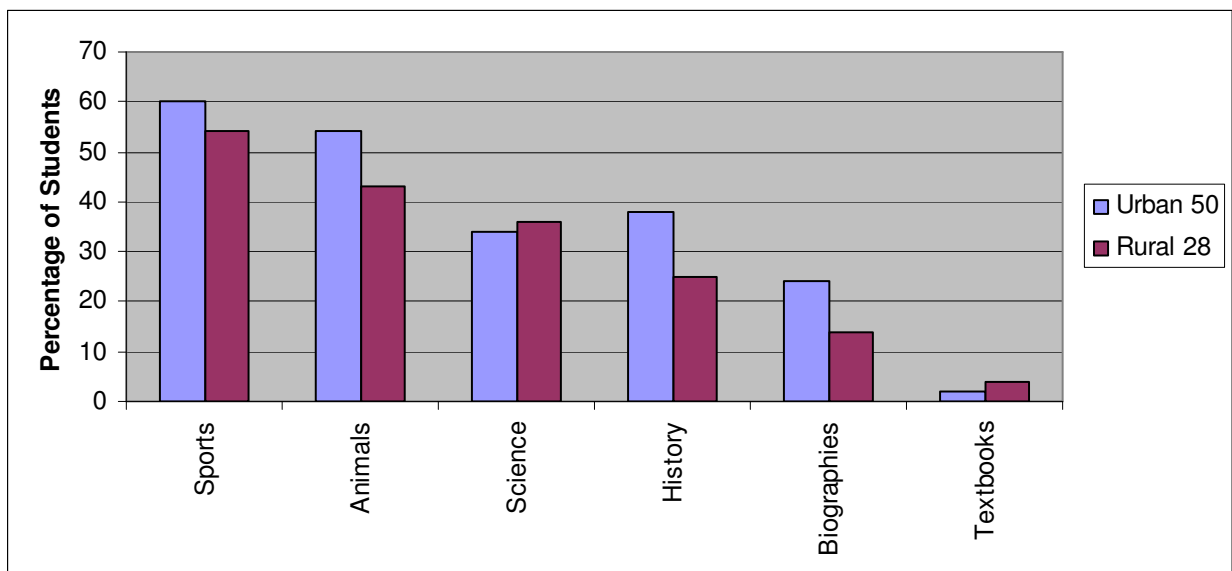
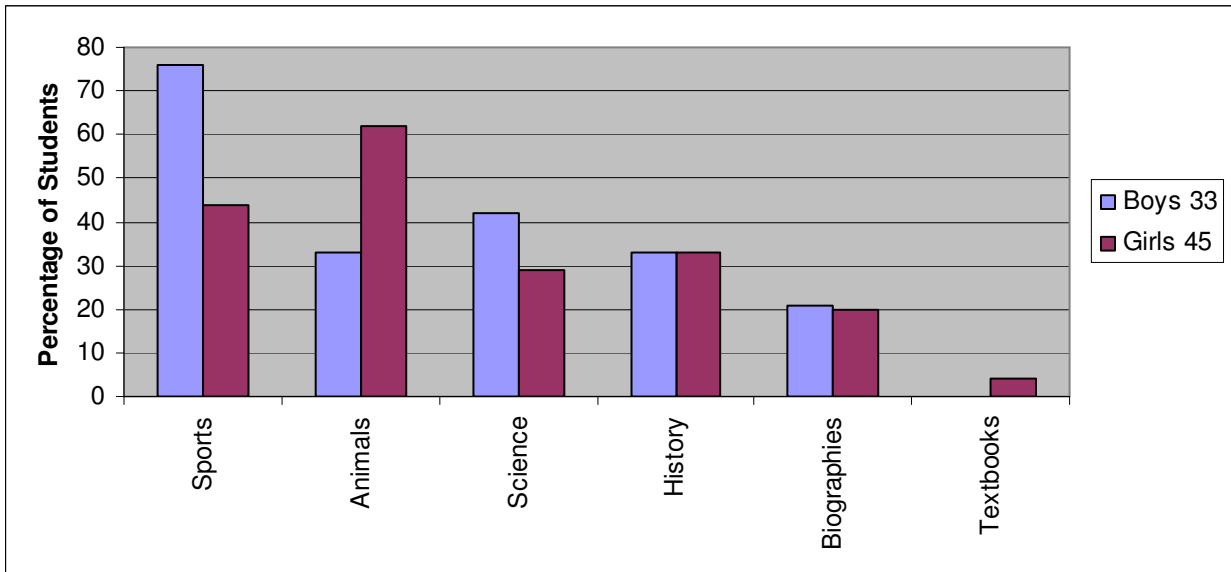


FIGURE 8

PREFERRED NONFICTION MATERIALS AND GENDER



CHAPTER VI

Discussion

Choosing free time activities is an important step for a student in developing their own linguistic individualism (Nippold, 2007). Through interactions with peers and experiencing new activities, new interests begin to form. By middle school, students read independently and choose their own reading materials. When students choose to read outside of school they choose materials that are relevant to their interests which increase reading motivation (Salinger, 2007). Students then develop a vocabulary specific to their chosen interests and reading materials.

The purposes of this study were to determine whether or not sixth grade girls and boys in an urban and rural public school differ in their preferred leisure activities, in particular the activities that are literacy based. The second purpose was to identify if a relationship exists between school community and gender in time spent reading for fun. The third purpose was to identify if time spent on homework impacted time spent reading for fun. The fourth purpose was to gather data regarding the types of materials the students preferred to read, including preferred fiction and nonfiction materials. Types of preferred reading materials will be discussed with preferred types of free-time activities.

Free-Time Activities

Results of the preferred free time activities of the students from the urban and rural schools indicated that community size does have some affect on the types of free time activities sixth grade students engage in during their free time. Most of the preferred free time activities of the rural students were activities that could be done at home. For example, while more urban students reported shopping at the mall, more rural students reported shopping on the internet. Rural students reported watching TV or movies and playing cards or board games. It was

expected that the rural students would show a greater interest in riding all-terrain vehicles (ATV's) and 4-H but not found in the present study.

All sixth grade students in the present study preferred engaging in free time activities with their peers. Urban and rural students preferred playing group sports. While more rural students preferred to hang out with their friends, both groups rated this activity highly. A preferred solo activity for all the students was listening to music. While this can be an individual activity, most students probably share musical interests with their friends and listen to music with their friends. All the activities rated lowest, with the exception of individual sports, could be due to lack of those activities being available in the communities (eg., 4-H; Boys and Girls Club).

Certain activities listed in the free-time activity question were literacy related. These were activities that required a higher understanding of language to be successful (eg., texting, instant messaging) or required reading as well as an understanding of language specific to the activity (eg., cooking, computer and video games). Urban and rural students reported texting, cooking, and playing video or computer games. Interestingly, more rural students reported engaging in instant messaging and writing during their free time.

Similarities in preferred free-time activities between boys and girls were noted in the present study. When divided by gender, music was rated as the most preferred free-time activity for boys and girls. Trends in activities involving peers were noted when gender differences were analyzed. Similarly to the results for community, boys and girls preferred playing group sports and hanging out with friends.

Gender differences in literacy related free-time activities were comparable to Nippold's study of free-time activities. Boys in both studies preferred playing video and computer games

and more girls than boys preferred activities that involved reading. While Nippold found that writing was more preferred by the girls in her study, results of the current study indicated that approximately the same number of boys and girls preferred writing as a free time activity. The girls in both studies reported reading more than the boys, however in Nippold's study of 6th grade students, the percentage of students who preferred reading as a free time activity was higher than the current study.

Reading Materials

Magazines were the first choice of reading materials for all students in the present study. While more urban students preferred comics, both groups reported reading novels. Interestingly, neither group reported reading newspapers. This could be due to an increase in newspapers being accessible online.

Because gender is socially constructed and sociocultural practices are different for boys and girls, it makes sense to conclude that their preferred literacies will differ as well. Blair (2007) found that boys view literacy differently than girls. They viewed literacy and school reading as excluding preferred materials. This is also reflected in the types of materials the boys in the present study reported reading. The boys reported reading comics and internet articles which are not traditionally considered academic materials. More girls preferred novels and more boys preferred non-fiction books. While all students preferred magazines, a higher number of girls reported reading magazines. Ivey and Broadus (2001) and Hughes-Hassell and Rode (2007) reported that all the students in their studies had a high preference for magazines as well.

Preferred types of fiction materials for urban and rural students were mysteries, humor, and adventure fiction. Rural students also reported liking fantasy. Textbooks were the least

preferred type of reading material in the present study which matched with results found by Ivey and Broaddus (2001).

Boys and girls reported liking to read mystery and adventure fiction. Boys reported reading humor and girls reported reading fantasy. In a study by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, they found that the girls preferred realistic fiction, mystery, and fantasy, while the boys preferred adventure and action-oriented fiction and nonfiction.

Urban and rural students highly preferred reading nonfiction books. While both groups reported preferred non-fiction materials about sports and animals, urban students also reported liking history non-fiction while rural students reported liking science non-fiction. Current events, i.e. the election year, could have impacted these differences. Textbooks, which were listed as a nonfiction material also, were not highly preferred.

When asked what types of non-fiction materials they liked to read, both boys and girls reported reading materials about animals, sports, and history. Additionally, boys reported reading science materials. Overall, gender and community size did not appear to have a big effect on the types of materials or types of fiction and non-fiction the students liked to read.

Reading for Fun

The second purpose was to identify if a relationship exists between school community and gender in time spent reading for fun. There was a significant difference between the amount of time urban and rural students read for fun. Urban students reported spending more time reading than rural students. These results support results found by Greensburg, Gilbert, & Fredrick (2006). They reported that the urban students they surveyed read more than the rural students.

Results of the present study indicated that girls read more than boys. While the differences in reading and gender were not found to be significant in Nippold's study, the present study found significant differences in the time male and female students spent reading for fun. This finding aligns with other studies looking at gender and leisure reading. Hughes-Hassell and Rodge and Greensburg, Gilbert, & Fredrick (2006) found that girls read for fun more than boys. A possible discrepancy could lie in the student's definitions of reading. For example, Blair (2007) found that boys view school definitions of literacy and reading as excluding their preferred reading materials. The preferred types of materials that the boys in the present study reported reading for fun were comics and internet articles which do not fit into the traditional definition of literacy or reading. These results are significant and need to be factored into the suggestions made to students regarding types of reading materials. Students from the study by Moss and Hendershot (2002) reported that having choices in the materials they read was a critical motivator for them; especially when those choices were not limited to fiction materials.

The third purpose was to identify whether or not time spent on homework impacted time spent reading for fun. It was hypothesized that, due to an increase in the amount of homework the students were used to, time for leisure reading would decrease and time on homework would increase. Results from this study indicated that leisure reading was not impacted by the time students spent doing homework when both community and gender were considered.

In conclusion, the urban students and the girls in the study spent more time reading for fun. Time spent on homework did not affect the amount of time the students spent reading for fun. The most preferred free time activities for all the students involved their peers. Literacy activities that were enjoyed were texting, cooking, writing, and instant messaging. Magazines were the top choice of reading materials for all the students. More urban students reported liking

comics while more rural students preferred novels. The boys in the study preferred comics, internet articles, and non-fiction books and the girls reported reading novels.

Implications for Teachers and Speech Language Pathologists

The present study provided information for teachers and Speech Language Pathologists to make recommendations to students regarding types of reading materials that may interest them. It also allows professionals to see what interests the students in this study have and the types of materials they view as reading related. An important consideration is to incorporate nontraditional literacy materials into the classroom environment to increase motivation and help the students to understand they are literacy related as well. All the students in the current study expressed an interest in reading magazines. Incorporating these in the classroom could boost motivation for school work and reading. In addition, all of the students expressed interests in group activities, which could be transferred into the classroom environment as well.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the current study was the small size of the sample. Another limitation was the similarity of the groups selected. For ease of research the urban and rural groups selected were similar in demographics. This limitation will affect the ease of generalization to other groups. Another limitation of the current study was the students who participated were able to because their parents had given their consent initially. It is possible to conclude that the sample was somewhat skewed due to this limitation. Since the teacher from the rural school was asked to administer the survey due to logistical reasons, it is possible that the differences in administrators between the two schools was a factor affecting the rural students.

Future Research

Using the information obtained for the present study, selecting a more heterogeneous sample could render different results that could possibly prove more representative of the middle school population. In addition to the survey, having the students write a brief paper on a topic of their choosing would provide insight into the student's linguistic individualism, or their specific vocabulary as it pertains to their preferred literacy activities. Conducting interviews with the students to allow them the opportunity to expand their survey answers would provide more insight into their preferred activities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Parent/Caregiver Consent Form

PURPOSE: Your student is invited to participate in a study of types of free-time activities preferred by 6th grade students in both rural and urban communities. **Previous studies have shown a decline in free-time reading interest during middle school.** Through this study conducted by the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Wichita State University, **we hope to learn more about students' current reading interests to encourage reading as a viable free time activity.**

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Your student's classroom was selected to participate in this free-time activity study with your principal **and teacher's** permission. About 50 students are expected to participate in this study.

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES: A short survey and vocabulary test will be done in English class taking approximately 15 minutes. **Examples of survey questions are: How much time do you spend each day reading for fun outside of school? Have you read a book that is also a movie? How much time do you spend each day reading for fun outside of school?**

DISCOMFORTS/RISKS: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

BENEFITS: Results could potentially help educators choose reading that is most motivating for middle school students.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Only group results will be studied and each students' name and results will be confidential. All records will be kept locked in the university professor's office.

REFUSAL/WITHDRAWAL: **All students will take part in the survey during class; however, participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you or your student does not give consent to participate, his/her survey will not be included in the study.** Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to have your student participate, you may withdraw you student at any time without penalty.

CONTACT: **If you have any questions about your student's rights as a research subject, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.** If you have any questions about the study please contact me Dr. Kathy Strattman (316-978-6356) Communication Sciences and Disorders or Kathy.strattman@wichta.edu.

Give Consent

I understand that by signing this consent form, I am indicating my voluntary permission for _____ to participate in this study.

Please sign your name

Date

Do Not Give Consent

I understand by signing this consent form, I am indicating that I **do not** want _____ to participate in this study.

Please sign your name

Date

Kathy Strattman, PhD
Primary Investigator

Kylea Schrag, BA
Co-Investigator

Please return the signed copy to school with your student. **You may keep a copy of this consent form.** Thanks.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY

Male _____

Female _____

1. How do you like to spend your free time? Check all that apply.
 - a. Watching; ___TV/Movies; ___ Sports
 - b. Playing; ___ Computer/Video Games; ___ Cards/Board Games
 - c. Playing Sports; ___ Group; ___ Individual
 - d. Music; ___ Listening (iPod, CDs); ___ Concerts
 - e. Shopping; ___ Mall; ___ Internet
 - f. Creative Activities; ___ Cooking; ___ Art; ___ Writing; ___ Photography
 - g. Large Group Activities; ___ 4-H; ___ Boys & Girls Club; ___ Youth Group
 - h. Friends; ___ Hanging Out; ___ Phone; ___ Texting; ___ Internet Chat
 - i. Solo/Small Group Activities: ___ Riding ATV's; ___ RC Cars; ___ Reading
 - j. Other _____

2. How much time do you spend each day reading for fun outside of school? This is reading that you choose. (Circle one)
 - a. None
 - b. 5-10 minutes
 - c. 10-20 minutes
 - d. 20-30
 - e. 30-60
 - f. 1-2 hours
 - g. 2-3 hours
 - h. More than 3 hours

3. Do you wish you could spend more time reading for fun?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. about right

4. What kinds of materials do you like to read for fun? (Circle all that apply)
 - a. Poems
 - b. Non-fiction books
 - c. Plays
 - d. Novels
 - e. Comics
 - f. Magazines
 - g. Newspapers
 - h. Technical books (auto repair, science, history, computers)
 - i. Things on the Internet
 - j. Other: _____

5. Have you read a book that is also a movie?
 - a. Yes
 - b. NoIf yes, which did you do first?
 - c. Watch the movie
 - d. Read the book

13. I would read more if
- a. The library had books I like
 - b. I didn't have so much homework
 - c. I received a reward for reading
 - d. I had help finding good books
 - e. My friends read more
 - f. It wouldn't matter because I don't like to read

(One= strongly agree, five= strongly disagree)

14. I understand what I read.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

15. I read quickly.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

16. I find books I like to read.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

APPENDIX C
VOCABULARY LIST

Check all below that are NOT real words.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angle | <input type="checkbox"/> Furious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shore | <input type="checkbox"/> Cliff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fragment | <input type="checkbox"/> Seblement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thimmery | <input type="checkbox"/> Nuisance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secretary | <input type="checkbox"/> Composer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disler | <input type="checkbox"/> Funnel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wrist | <input type="checkbox"/> Argument |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Subting | <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ankle | <input type="checkbox"/> Weary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Falfold | <input type="checkbox"/> Hould |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Antler | <input type="checkbox"/> Grain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competition | <input type="checkbox"/> Grooming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholar | <input type="checkbox"/> Snarling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gnawing | <input type="checkbox"/> Plabage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reweat | <input type="checkbox"/> Wedge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dropant | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Musician | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Swamp | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coin | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compass | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ordiful | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arrate | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bugle | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sheal | |

APPENDIX D

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Student Assent Form

PURPOSE: You are invited to participate in a study to investigate the activities available to sixth grade students.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: You were selected as a possible participant in this free-time activity study because of your age.

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES: The free-time activity study includes a 16 question survey and a short vocabulary knowledge assessment. This should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Individual results would remain confidential.

Give Assent

Although my parent/caregiver has given consent, I understand that participating in the free-time activity study is my choice. By signing this assent form, I am indicating my voluntary permission to use my survey results. I know that my name will not be used beyond this assent form, and my teacher will not know if I participate in the study or not.

Please sign your name

Date

Do Not Give Consent

I understand that participating in the free-time activity study is my choice. By not signing this assent form, I am indicating that I do not want my survey results to be used.

Please sign your name

Date

Kathy Strattman, PhD
Primary Investigator

Kylea Schrag
Co-Investigator

I have been informed that neither my permission nor my results will be shared with staff members at my school.

APPENDIX E

COMMUNITY DIFFERENCES IN FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES

		URBAN	RURAL
PLAYING:	COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES	72%	68%
	CARDS/BOARDGAMES	36%	54%
CREATIVE ACTIVITIES	COOKING	48%	46%
	WRITING	22%	36%
FRIENDS:	TEXTING	40%	43%
	INSTANT MESSAGING	26%	39%
SOLO ACTIVITIES:	READING	38%	36%

APPENDIX F

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES

		BOYS	GIRLS
PLAYING:	COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES	79%	64%
	CARDS/BOARDGAMES	45%	40%
CREATIVE ACTIVITIES	COOKING	27%	62%
	WRITING	24%	29%
FRIENDS:	TEXTING	30%	49%
	INSTANT MESSAGING	36%	27%
SOLO ACTIVITIES	READING	30%	42%