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The Impact of Interest: A Reading Study

Abstract

This article discusses the current negative relationships many middle school students have with reading. Using published scholarship as well as the results of a survey and focus group I conducted in an eighth grade English classroom as evidence, I argue that the disconnect students feel from reading is caused by their misunderstanding of what being a “reader” actually entails. Many students can read with more mastery than they realize and read more often than they are aware. However, because of students’ lack of interest in the topics of the assigned texts in their English classes or their past experiences with struggling to comprehend the unfamiliar terminology in their textbooks, students are increasingly becoming aliterate. The longer these aliterate students, who can read but choose not to, stay on this path, the harder it appears to be to convince them to participate in their courses’ academic reading activities. This presents educators with the task of bringing to light all of the legitimate reading activities students do outside of the school day as well as convincing alleged “non-readers” and aliterate students to more actively participate in the literacy activities in school.

Inspiration

For my first practice teaching experience, my university sent me to a typical Minnesota public high school. By the time I joined my assigned ninth grade English class on a semi-regular basis, their teacher had made it through teaching the first half of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. I mostly observed the class as they continued through the rest of the play, and I was struck by the overwhelming amount of negativity these students showed towards the text. They muttered about how much they hated it, how stupid the story was, and how dumb the language sounded. They also often said "I have no idea what is happening" and "I don't care" whenever they were asked about the story. Many of them clearly were not following along when they were supposed to be listening to the teacher read it aloud during class, and these same students obviously did not read the play independently at home. As a future secondary English teacher, I was disheartened to see so many young students reject this text and many of their teacher's attempts to get them involved in the related reading assignments. I held on to the hope that perhaps these students' disinterest in Shakespeare was unique to this particular group, but as my time in this classroom continued past the conclusion of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit, the students' apathy towards reading assignments remained. So, I decided I needed to start looking into methods of drawing today's students into participating in reading activities so they can view reading in a positive light and hopefully become lifelong readers.

The Conversation at Hand

During the past decade, technology has advanced in all areas of our lives. With so many new distractions and pastimes, Americans seem to be turning to literature less and less. In fact, according to the The National Endowment for the Arts' yearly survey, "The percentage of American adults who read literature — any novels, short stories, poetry or plays — fell to at least

a three-decade low” in 2015. During the entire year, only “43 percent of adults read at least one work of literature” (Ingraham). This means that less than half of the adult population in the United States is using literature for entertainment or pleasure. Without the adults in their life modelling what it looks like to be a lifelong reader, children are understandably coming to school with more apathy towards the reading activities they are assigned. The growing level of student apathy towards reading has concerned many scholars in recent years and fueled many research studies and articles about the issue.

As students continue to feed their own beliefs that reading is not worth their time, their abilities to read and effectively work with a text are crippled, or at best, stagnant. Meanwhile, the students who have a more positive view of reading and fully engage in class reading activities are developing their reading skills and creating a bigger gap between them and their disinterested classmates. In “The Literacy Needs of Adolescents: Going Deeper,” Robert Rothman points to several education experts who have worked with this issue of students’ poor reading abilities and habits and highlights some of their thoughts on possible solutions to these problems. Rothman first discusses Donna Alvermann’s theory of what is preventing students from growing their reading skills, saying “Alvermann argues that, for many adolescents, there is a disconnect between in-school reading and out-of-school reading, and this gap — which she refers to as aliteracy — poses a significant challenge for schools” (3). Alvermann’s theory is that students actually do a lot more reading than they think they do because their definition of reading is limited to the kind that feels like the traditional study of academic texts that occurs only at school. Rothman also highlights the ideas of Glynda Hull and Jessica Zacher, as their work deals with the creation of after-school programs that will give students the chance to develop their literacy skills through non-traditional modes like “graphic and visual images . . . forms that

schools seldom consider” (Rothman 4). In a country where standardized testing skills often take precedence in the classroom, the idea of educators and students taking advantage of alternative, edgy after-school activities to supplement the more traditional literacy activities done in the classroom sounds like a promising compromise that will benefit all those involved.

Advocates of the importance of literacy skills being taught in all subjects, Mary Neuman and Sanjiv Rao focus their work more on what it takes to make students literate and discuss the need for teachers across every discipline to be explicitly teaching literacy skills. In “Adolescent Literacy: Beyond English Class, Beyond Decoding Text,” these scholars appear to be studying only the traditional academic “reading” that students associate with school. However, their claim that “the literacy problem among adolescents is partly caused by the way high schools view literacy and their responsibility for developing it” applies to all areas of literacy, not just the kind developed in English class (Neuman and Rao 6). Interested in students’ literacy skills in all subjects, Neuman and Rao strongly believe each subject’s texts need to be studied with content specific “habits of mind,” and “these habits of mind need to be taught explicitly, simultaneously with the content” (9). This discussion of the need to have every teacher value and enact the teaching of literacy within their own classroom points to a possible solution to some of the students’ issues with reading texts they struggle to work with and do not understand. As students gain more positive experiences with literacy activities in all of their different classes, students’ confidence in themselves and view of reading as a whole will improve, which will place students in a position to start seeing the value of school literacy activities.

In addition to the need for students to be explicitly taught literacy skills, Alvermann believes teachers have to work to change the common mindset among students that the reading activities done in school are developing strictly school related skills. As Rothman mentioned in

his article, Alvermann's work focuses on the disconnect students have between their personal reading and what is done in the classroom. Alvermann believes that a key reason so many students might be reading their own texts outside of class but refuse to do so in class is because teachers have made reading unengaging and unrelated to their lives. In "Adolescent Aliteracy: Are Schools Causing It?" Alvermann focuses on aliteracy, which is when students "have the ability to read but choose not to do so -- perhaps, in part, because certain aspects of schooling sap their motivation and give them reasons to believe they are not readers" (26). Alvermann offers a few ideas about how to combat or correct this aliteracy in students, such as providing students with "a purpose for engaging in school-related literacy tasks" as well as instilling in them a belief in "their ability to perform such tasks successfully" (29). In other words, educators need to show their students that the literacy skills taught and developed in school are also used in all areas of their life, so academic reading activities will help them build useful skills that they can easily translate to their everyday activities and tasks outside of the classroom. Additionally, throughout this process, teachers should also be working with their students to instill their personal confidence. Alvermann gives a few examples of students who participate in literate activities that are considered outside of the scholarly realm of "reading" and points to the skills the students practice and demonstrate through these activities.

Also interested in aliteracy, Lenters claims that students who are not illiterate are often aliterate. She draws specific attention to the impact of interest, saying that these types of students often know what they do like to read. Offering a potential solution to the problem, Lenters thinks that access to a greater variety of reading materials, in both genre and actual style of reading material, will dramatically decrease the number of aliterate students choosing to not engage in the readings for class. Lenters also points out that students tend to choose these

reading materials for personal reasons, such as that they are interested in the topic or more easily understand a particular style of writing or mode of delivery, so students take it as a personal slight when teachers do not validate their personal reading choices. “Through devaluing adolescents’ out-of-school reading and by not stocking the kinds of texts students want to read,” schools are sending students the message that their personal reading activities and preferences are bad or wrong (138). This strengthens each student’s resolve to avoid reading in school as well as their belief that their outside reading is not really “reading.” Lenters explains that there is a great need for the literary canon to be “pruned” so it truly reflects the goal of English teachers to help students relate to and learn from the texts in both personal and skills based ways.

As long as the discussion about students’ literacy skills and reading habits continues, passionate scholars will continue to conduct studies and produce scholarship that they hope will positively contribute to that discussion. In “Assessing Adolescents’ Motivation to Read,” Sharon M. Pitcher et al. discusses a study she and her three co-authors conducted in classrooms to figure out what makes up students’ reading habits. Using a reading survey as a means to collect data, their focus was to find out what exactly motivated students to read. A large portion of their findings and analysis, however, were related to the idea of students not really realizing what “reading” is and saying they were not readers despite their hours reading things on the internet, etc. “Students’ use of multiliteracies was overwhelmingly apparent in the interview” of the students, and yet students were unaware that many of their daily activities were actually building their literacy skills (Pitcher et al. 382). Pitcher et al. talk about a lot of the same ideas that are discussed in the other articles such as the elevated interest and participation of students when they are able to pick their own books or formats of reading. Overall, the study done by Pitcher et al. reinforces many of the ideas scholars currently have about students’ literacy.

From Inspiration to Action

Long after my first teaching experience ended, the frustration of my ninth grade students lingered in my mind. As a result, I started looking into the scholarship that has already been done on the topic of students' reading habits and their views on reading. When I was assigned to observe in another school a few months later, I decided to conduct my own small research study. After seeing what scholarship was already out there, I wanted to explore and expand upon some of the scholars' notions about readers with the specific students with which I had been working. My second teaching experience took place in a typical Wisconsin middle school, and I worked with eighth grade students. Because I was at a school in a different state, assigned to a slightly younger age group, and with a different teacher and set of students, I wasn't surprised when students' reactions to the ongoing reading assignments were different from those that I had witnessed a few months earlier. These eighth grade students had their own unique thoughts about everything, and the classroom teacher and I had a much easier time getting the majority of these students to participate in the daily in-class reading activities. However, I still heard the complaints of "this is stupid" or "I can't do this" from a sizeable portion of each of the three eighth grade classes I worked with, and I quickly realized that the overwhelming majority of these students also refused to do homework assignments that involved reading a text of any length.

With all of this in mind, I decided to create a research study that would give my participants the opportunity to talk about their relationships with reading and why they do or do not choose to engage in reading. I wanted to know what aspects of the school texts were preventing them from reading as well as how they viewed the other kinds of reading activities

they engage in outside of school. Due to my class schedule at my university, I was only able to be at the middle school for the duration of one full class period, so I asked one specific class to participate in my study. While this class often appeared interested in the large- and small-group discussions of their school texts, this set of students had a history of not completing or submitting assignments when left to their own devices. Even though I pitched my research project to a full class of students, only eight of the twenty-eight students turned in the student assent and parent consent forms that indicated they would participate. Of those eight students, only seven students actually participated because one of the girls was absent both days I visited the classroom. Therefore, the anonymous survey I created was given to all seven students, and because the group of participants ended up being so small, all seven of the students also participated in the focus group.

My Findings

The idea of reading appeared to always be connected with books and academic articles by my study's participants. This limited their scope by which to measure their actual amount of daily reading and enjoyment level across all of the types of reading they do. Before I was able to truly know what actions needed to be taken to help these students improve their reading habits and skills, I needed to first find out what their daily reading rituals were along with their thoughts about reading in general. To begin the study, I had them complete an anonymous survey that was full of questions related to how often they read, what sorts of texts they read, and their preferences for in-class reading assignments. I also had them self-identify what type of reader they were and was pleasantly surprised by their answers.

“Do you consider yourself a reader?” (answer choices: yes, kind of, and no)
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“On a scale of 1-10, rate your enjoyment while reading” (matched to their self-
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	identifications)
Kind of	2
No	3
Kind of	5
Kind of	5
yes	5
Kind of	8
yes	8

Out of seven students, only one indicated that they do not consider themselves a reader, and no one rated their enjoyment at the lowest rate of one. When studying the students' enjoyment numbers, I noticed that they could be divided into three groups. The students who wrote two and three are the most critical cases in my study and are most in need for immediate intervention. The three students who rated their enjoyment at a five are currently in a position where they might continue to read, both for school and on their own, but they still need some help and encouragement with their reading to win them over. Finally, the two students who labeled their enjoyment level an eight out of ten are an educator's dream, as they might already have enough of a love for reading that they will likely continue on with the habit in and out of school. Although, when the students were asked to self-identify as a reader, non-reader, or somewhere in between, their answers again placed them into three sub-groups, but students were shifted around in these groupings. When these two questions and the corresponding answers are studied together, it becomes clear that the students' personal definitions of what makes a reader vary vastly from one another.

Due in part to the small number of participants, several of the questions on the anonymous survey yielded inconclusive results. One such question asked students to indicate

their favorite genres, and with only seven students’ answers to compare, I found no notable similarities or contrasts in answers. As shown in the table below, the students each circled multiple genres, and their interests appear to be pretty evenly spread out between the genres. The list of genres I added into this question were also primarily literary genres, so it is possible that the way I wrote this question and its list of possible answers is what limited the students’ answers.

Most Liked Genres	
Mystery -- 4	Science Fiction -- 2
Adventurous Fiction -- 3	Thriller -- 2
Fantasy -- 3	Biography/Autobiography -- 1
Non-fiction --3	Fairy Tale -- 1
Humorous Fiction -- 2	Historical Fiction -- 1
Realistic Fiction -- 2	Information Texts -- 1
Romance -- 2	Dystopian Novels -- 1 (write-in)

However, when asked to indicate the genres that cause the most struggles, the students’ answers did overwhelmingly fall under the more academic, traditional types of writing. The three genres that cause these seven students the most trouble are historical fiction, biography/autobiography, and informational texts. During the focus group, two of the students spoke specifically about how boring and hard it was for them to do their textbook readings, referring to separate science and history classes, because of how textbooks are written. Student F said the content in the history textbook was boring but also admitted, “I am a slow reader, so that makes it even harder to focus on historical texts.” Student G then added that their text for science “was frustrating because of all the terms it used.” Another student mentioned a time

when they were assigned a long article about drug addiction, and because it was an informative piece on a topic they were not interested in, the whole assignment “was kind of stressful” (Student B). Overall, the students in my study were in agreement that they struggled the most with reading when they were assigned academic texts that were dense with content-specific terminology.

Only one survey question was answered the same by the majority of the participants. Students were asked what type of book they prefer to read in class and were given the options of “choice book, all-class book, both types, or neither type.” As shown in the tables below, five of the seven students circled “choice book.” The remaining two students chose either “both types” or “neither type,” leaving the “all-class book” option as no one’s preference. Admittedly, when I wrote this question into the survey, I expected most of the students to prefer reading their own “choice book” and avoid the “all-class book” option at all costs because of the scholarship I had already read about students’ preference for personal choice. Still, the reasons students gave for their preferred type of book gave insight into both the opinions students have about the books they read and how in tune these eighth grade students are with their reading needs.

Preferred Type of Book to Read in Class	Number of Students	Students’ Reasons
Choice Book	5	<p>“All kids in the class can relate to the text”</p> <p>“I like to have more of a choice for what I read or I’m bound to not enjoy it as much”</p> <p>“We have smaller groups to work in”</p> <p>“If I pick a book I enjoy reading, it’s easier for me to understand and keep interest in it”</p> <p>“Then I can pick what I’m most interested in”</p>

All-class book	0	(none)
Both Types	1	“Because they [both] are usually very interesting. They are also usually realistic fiction, and I enjoy that type of genre”
Neither Type	1	“Because I like to be outside and in the wild”

A quick read-through of the students’ reasons for their preferred book type is enough to see that each of the students was able to justify their preference in a logical way. Further study of their individual reasons, however, brings to light much more about these students and their understandings of what goes into the acts of reading and working with any kind of text. In the “choice book” section, for example, the students’ answers are all primarily focused on the idea that the students believe they will have a better overall experience with books they choose because they know what topics and book styles most interest them. The students also mention other benefits of choice books, like being able to work with the text with fewer people and the higher likelihood of every student in class being able to relate to their chosen book. These aspects of the students’ justifications highlight these eighth grade students’ abilities to identify types of learning environments that work best for them as well as recognize the power texts can have when the reader can relate to it in some way. Not only do these students place value in having the autonomy to choose their own texts, but they know their reading experiences will likely rank higher in their own minds if the reading conditions are optimal for them.

In an effort to get the study participants to think about their daily reading habits that fall outside of the traditional book or academic article type of reading, I included a question in the anonymous survey that asked the students to circle all of the types of “other” reading they do on their own. Again, because the survey was only taken by seven students, the results this question yielded are too few to indicate any notable trend among the data. As shown in the table below,

the students' answers fall across almost all of the categories. Each student circled a few different kinds of "other" reading they do on their own, and no two students had the same combination of reading options circled. This could be evidence that the most common reading activities can vary greatly from person to person, even in a group as small as seven students.

Kinds of "Other" Reading You Do on Your Own	
Magazine -- 5	Newspaper -- 1
Snapchat articles -- 4	Twitter -- 0
Academic Texts -- 2	Instagram Memes -- 1 (write-in)
Facebook posts/articles -- 2	Role Plays -- 1 (write-in)
Email -- 1	Comments on Things -- 1 (write-in)

From the anonymous survey to the focus group activity, students' self-evaluations of how often they read in a single day changed quite a bit. When they first filled out the survey, all seven students marked their average school day reading habits at either "Never," "30 min/day," or "Never/Sometimes 30 min/day." After reading these anonymous answers, I was surprised during the focus group activity to hear the students talk about all of the reading they do on a typical school day. While the students remained firm in their unanimous agreement on non-school day reading being a rarity, six of the seven students shared reading habits for a typical school day that added up to more than a half hour. None of the participants made drastic change to their account of how much reading takes place on a typical school day. However, the act of jotting down a general idea of what reading activities they normally engage in and then discussing what they wrote with the group seemed to remind the participants of all of the reading they actually do outside of the classroom.

When the students were taking turns talking about some of the reading they do outside of school on a typical school day, a few of the students indicated that their daily reading habits vary depending on what homework they have and whatever else is going on in their lives. One of the participants said they would only do extra reading outside of school on a school day if the book they were assigned in English was interesting. Two other participants chimed in with related comments, agreeing with one another that they often read ahead in class texts if they have enough extra time on a school night. Any time there was a lull or the students had all finished answering a particular question, I tried to steer the conversation towards the types of reading they engage in outside of the traditional books or academic articles. While some of the participants shared the other types of reading they do, the students' responses did not add any new or contradictory trends in data when compared to the result of the same question on the survey. Additionally, even though I told them that any sort of reading of text counts and adds to their experiences as a reader, the group as a whole looked unconvinced and repeatedly centered their answers around books or articles they had read previously for school.

The one question the students were most enthusiastic to answer during the focus group was one that gave them the power to tell me what sort of topics and text styles I should offer to my future students when I become an English teacher. Several participants yelled their ideas out at the same time, bursting with their preferences and opinions. Many students mentioned favorite books or positive reading experiences that were part of a book series. One of the students explained their love of reading started when they borrowed the first book of a series from their third grade classroom and became obsessed with that particular series. Two other students chimed in to agree that they preferred a book series to a stand-alone book because they can follow the characters' storylines through more time and plot developments. The answers

given during the focus group made it obvious that many of the participants were most interested in the thoughts and emotions of characters in the books they read. No matter the genre, the participants agreed they like to see how these characters think, how that affects their actions, and how their emotions impact their actions. They also like to get involved in the emotions of the characters in their books as they “like getting to see what’s going on in the character’s head” and feel like they are experiencing the events, too (Student 3).

Even when I was in the beginning stages of my research, I referred to this study as “The Impact of Interest.” I had tentatively given my project this name because my previous experiences in the classroom with middle school students showed me how immediate and strong of a connection they have with activities and topics they chose for themselves. After studying the reasons the students gave for their class book reading preferences, I knew my initial theory about personal interest playing a key role in whether or not students choose to read or not read was on the right track. As I conducted the study and studied the results, however, I realized the students’ lack of interest in reading partially stems from their misunderstanding of what really counts as reading. These students were in desperate need of a new definition of what reading really is and how it is something they already do all of the time. With a new outlook on their daily reading, I believe these students would be more willing to consider themselves readers, possibly even good readers, and this changed outlook would help them be more successful when they encounter all sorts of the typical, academic types of reading in school.

Changing the Old Definition

First, before educators can make any real progress in the teaching and encouragement of reading with their students, the understanding of what makes up “real” reading needs to be

clarified, or for some, redefined entirely. Luckily, there is a group, relatively new in the world of literary scholarship, that has devoted the past few decades to the study of what kinds of real reading is going on outside of the classroom. This group calls the culmination of their ongoing efforts to study and define the reading habits of today's societies New Literacy Studies. A brief look into the work done in the name of NLS shows decades of scholarship that illustrates the changing picture of what reading looks like in the lives of everyday people. As discussed earlier in this paper, the number of advancements in technology have surged in recent years, and NLS scholars would argue that this surge is the greatest cause for the need for a change in the reading definition.

In a review of the work and progress of NLS since its conception, Kathy Ann Mills labels “the most recent, significant shift in this field” as “the ‘digital turn’ — that is, the increased attention to new literacy practices in digital environments across a variety of social contexts, such as workplaces and educational, economic, and recreational sites” (246-247). The rising use of electronic platforms for reading does not stamp out the beauty or power in the usual, traditional printed texts, but as Mills points out, it is impossible to ignore these platforms completely as they are “a consequence of globalization and the growing range of technologies for communication” in today's world (247). So, in a world where lovers of strictly traditional literature are dwindling, educators need to redefine what types and modes of texts are available and most often used by their students. In order to truly help today's students develop and sustain a positive relationship with reading, educators need to work with the NLS definition of “real reading” that includes various modes of print and digital works such as social media sites, blog posts, magazines, instructional manuals, and emails.

What This Means for Educators

Teach Skills to Navigate the Structure

Many of the students that participated in my research study mentioned that difficult vocabulary and sentence structures made them dislike a text or stop reading altogether. Referring to textbooks, the students pointed to the crucial need for their teachers to be creating lessons and activities that explicitly work on the skills required to read and comprehend the academic language used in their texts. These students' comments reaffirmed Freeman and Freeman's well-known belief that "teaching any subject involves teaching the language—the vocabulary and the organizational structures— common to that content area" (Freeman and Freeman 5). When choosing any type of text to use in class, educators need to consider how the structure and terminology will affect the students' abilities to work with that text. Teachers should keep an eye out for texts that are written at a higher level than their students are currently able to comprehend on their own, and teachers can either choose a text at a lower level or create lessons that will prepare students to work with higher-level texts. Once a text is deemed appropriate for the students, meaning the content, structure, or both provide an opportunity for students to develop and practice a specific skill, teachers need to think about their students and decide whether or not they need to do any explicit instruction about the text's structure or terminology before they hand out the actual text. By offering explicit instruction to the students on these potentially unfamiliar or difficult elements of the text, teachers will be giving students all of the information and skills they need, so students can be as prepared as possible to work with the text.

Slow Down to Speed Up

One of the main reasons teachers provide only one text option with their entire class is that it seems like the most efficient option, time-wise. Having everyone read and work with the same text allows the teacher to help all of the students on the same sections of the text at the same time. The big issue with all of that, however, is that these students are not all the same. As shown in my study, the majority of students prefer to have as much say as possible in what they read at school. Especially in middle school and high school, students are at an age when they are starting to know themselves on a deeper level, so they know what does and does not interest them. When working with the traditional classroom texts like books and articles, educators need to avoid assigning every student the same text, as it is likely the topic will not interest every student. Instead, offer students multiple texts to choose from that either have similar structures or address similar issues. This way, students can have some autonomy and control over their learning while the teacher can still create lessons and assignments for the entire class that cover the unified aspects of all of the texts. An issue with this type of assignment is that the process of offering and facilitating choice texts takes longer to set up, but the students' comments during my focus group suggests that more students will read their texts, and do so at a faster rate, because they are actually interested in their texts. With this incentive in mind, teachers need to spend some extra time prepping their choice reading options before the year or term starts, picking multiple appropriate texts with several different points of interest. After the long process of setting up a unit with several texts and getting each student their preferred text is over, the reading of and work with those texts will go by faster and smoother than ever due to the students' elevated interest in the text as well as their pleasure from having some personal autonomy in the classroom.

Beware of Books and Embrace Electronics

Along with offering students a choice in the topics that they read about, teachers should be incorporating a variety of reading activities into daily lessons and assignments that allow students to work with all sorts of texts. While books are an important part of every English class and always will be, teachers need to be careful that they do not rely on books as their one text type. There is “a call for an expanded vision of literacy” within the classroom, and “this concept of multiliteracies is one not only embraced by students but also cited by many as fundamental for students’ social futures” (Lenters 140). Each school year starts with a new set of students who is used to a new set of technology, so teachers need to be always adapting their activities to include as many relevant text types as possible. Students should be offered multiple platforms for their reading projects, such as the old school texts (books, newspapers, articles), poetry on tumblr, SnapChat’s “news” section, and whatever else an educator or student can think of that falls under the NLS’ umbrella of daily reading sources. If a book must be used or is the preferred type of text for a student, teachers should try to provide students with books that are the first in a series. This way, much like the students who will choose to work with texts from SnapChat articles or Twitter posts, the students reading books will be able to continue on their own with their preferred literacy activity by reading the remaining books in that series even after leaving school behind them.

Educators should also be creating reading activities and other assignments that build on the standard literacy skills students are already cultivating through the use of all the types of texts they encounter outside of school. Before Alvermann’s students were able to “demonstrate expertise in navigating literacy tasks,” they first tackled related “tasks that [were] personally

meaningful and that yield results that [were] useful to them,” such as sending emails or studying song lyrics (31). These kinds of creative activities should be included in all classrooms as they use a lot of the same skills needed for academic reading and will help bridge the gap for students between avoiding “reading” and considering themselves to be readers. By getting students to see that they already have an understanding of some literary skills because of all their time analyzing something like a friend’s social media posts, teachers will be able to show students how they can draw on the literacy knowledge they already have and use it with different text types, such as academic texts. Even though students might not initially understand the point behind an activity like using Twitter conversations to decipher the meanings behind texts, teachers need to continue to create literacy activities using text types students encounter in their daily routines because it will also eventually help students understand how much reading they do outside of school. Once the students recognize all of the reading they do in their daily life and appreciate how their literacy skills are useful both in the classroom and their daily life, more and more students will be able to identify as lifelong readers.

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