

Oh, For the Love of Reading!

**Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Abstract

The goal for this project is to examine the connection between students' pleasure reading and their literacy development. To conduct this research, my research partner and I collected data from Worcester Public School teachers in the form of a survey (21 participants) and an optional follow-up interview (3 participants). In conjunction with this research, my research partner and I organized the installation of a Book Nook in Columbus Park Elementary School to help the students of the school gain access to a diverse set of multicultural books for pleasure reading. These efforts combined highlight the connection between students developing stronger literacy skills when given books that actually spark their interests.

Introduction

Once Upon A Time (The Reader I Am)

My passion for reading started at a young age. I remember when I was little, lying in my parents' bed with my brothers as my mom read to us the picture book we voted on that night. I remember finally being able to turn those letters and shapes on the paper into words, and turning those words into sentences that I understood. I had a huge bin of books under my bed, and it became so full that my mom ended up getting me an old bookshelf to put in my room to store all of my books. Before every flight to visit my grandparents, we stopped and would get a book for the plane ride. For years, I never carried a bag that didn't have some book in it, even my mom's minivan had a permanent copy of Harry Potter in it for years, because someone in our house was always reading it. Joy for reading helped me greatly in my academic years to come. After second grade, I was consistently in the highest-level reading group. The two AP credits I brought to Clark were for AP Literature and AP Language and Composition. In school, I was always considered one of the “smart ones,” and it was because my reading was able to carry me through all my other classes. If you asked me, I wouldn't have said I was good at history or science, but I would get good grades because of my reading skills and being able to translate those into my other subjects. If I didn't grow up with a love of reading the way I did, I don't know where I would have ended up in life, even now, although I don't read as much as I used to, I still consider myself a reader. I don't have as much time to read for enjoyment as I did in elementary school, but I still do it as much as I can, and anytime I travel, I always have a book with me to read on the trip.

I was lucky to have my love of reading fostered in my life. I lived within walking distance of my town's library, and went to public schools that had libraries in them, and that

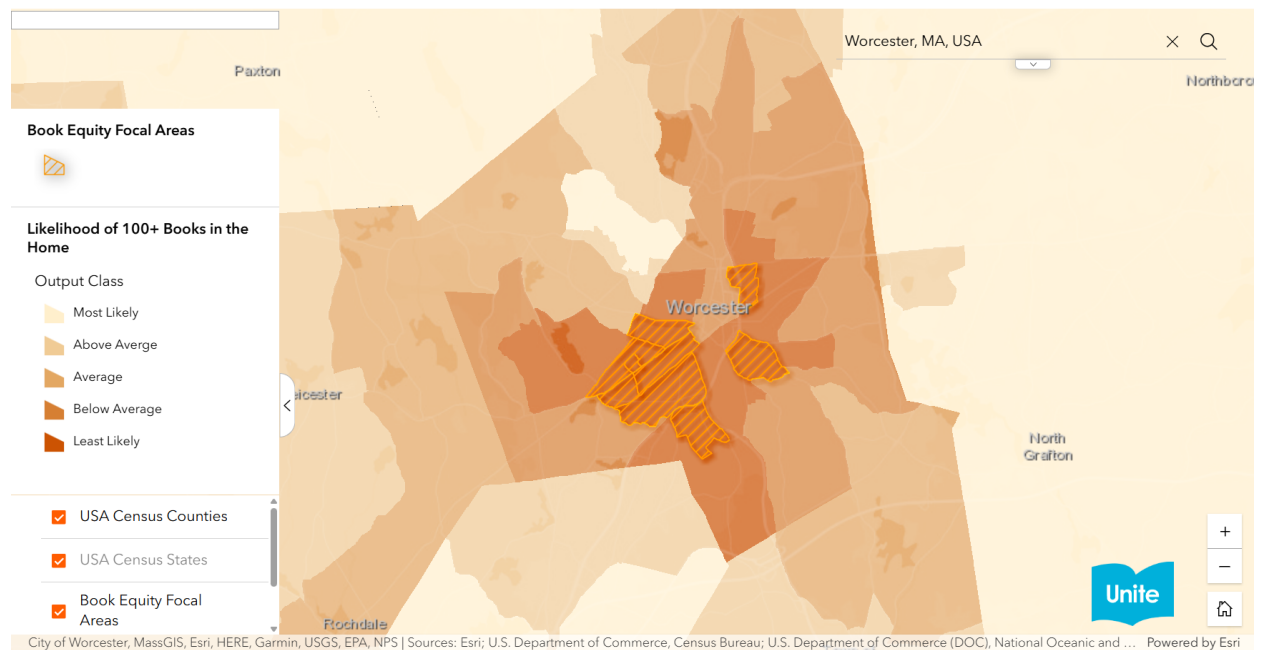
accessibility to books was part of the reason I was able to become a passionate reader. However, not every kid gets to grow up with the same access to books as I did. I was very privileged, and as I have grown up and left my small town, I can see more clearly how this access to literature is much different for many students.

A Project Born

In Spring Semester 2024, I was in Civics in Action with my future praxis partner, Gwenne Balcius, where we partnered together for our final project, which was to put together a proposal for a civically engaged project within a local scope. Gwenne came to me with the idea of a little free library, and I was immediately excited about it. With my love for reading, growing up to now, it was a perfect project for me. There were multiple little free libraries in my town, specifically, there was one in a local park where I used to take a book and read it until we had to leave the park and put it back in the little library. As we worked on the idea of our little Free Library on campus, we loved the idea of bridging a gap between the Clark community and the Main South neighborhood, in which our university campus is located. We created an entire proposal to present for our class's final, but even after that, we continued to pursue the idea. However, along the way and after meetings with our professor, Cara BergPowers, and the head of the Goddard Library, Laura Robinson, we realized that the little Free Library idea simply wasn't fitting our dreams anymore. It had too many limitations for what we wanted, and we realized it wasn't going to provide the access to books we truly wanted. After that realization, we began to transform our project into installing a Book Nook in a local Worcester School.

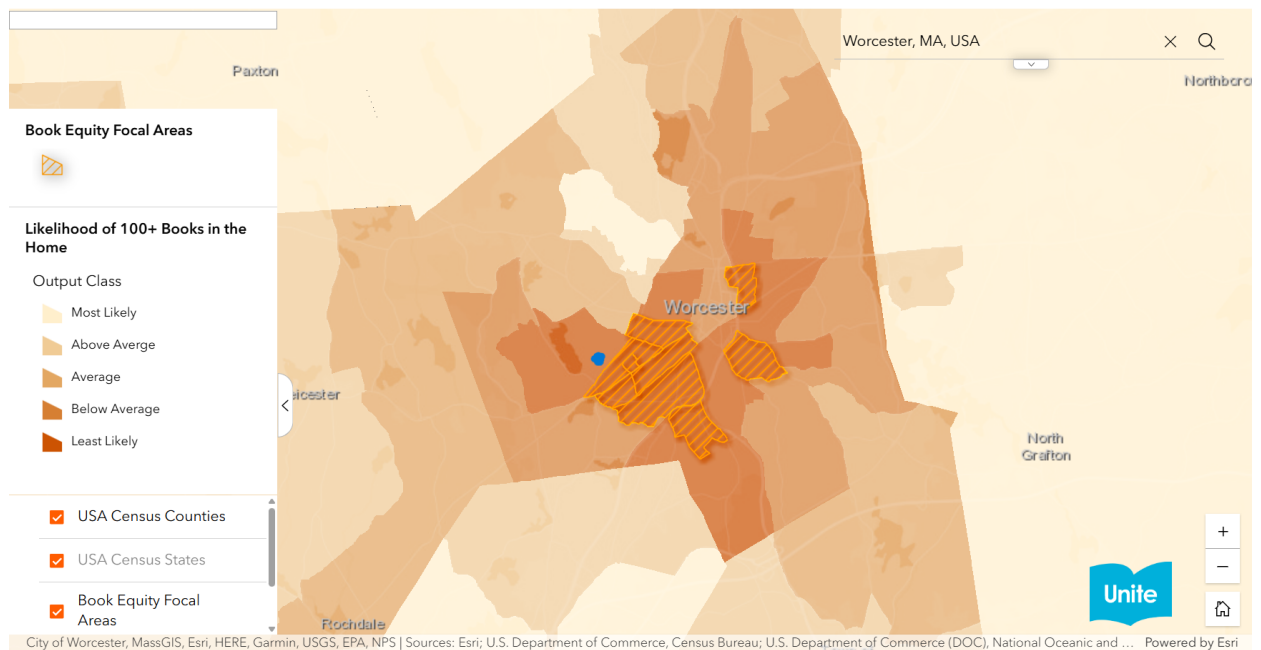
This realization had a domino effect of changing the location, from Clark, our home university, to a Worcester public school, which we did not have any direct ties to, and the size,

from a little library where we would have to provide only a few books to start, to a Book Nook which would require much more funding and resources. We wanted to keep the project based in Worcester for many reasons. Before officially tying this to being a praxis project, we knew from the inception that we wanted this to support the Worcester community. My project partner and I both come from towns with school libraries as well as public libraries, so we understood the value. Many Worcester schools do not have the same privileges afforded to them. Below is a map from the Unite for Literacy's website showing how a majority of Worcester falls into the book desert (Unite for Literacy, n.d).



Once this officially became our praxis project, we began our process of finding a school to build with. This being a praxis project gave us more backing from the Education Department, helping us secure more resources and be seen as a more serious project than it would have been if completed entirely independently. The professor of our first semester praxis course, Jie Park, helped us get in contact with Casey Starr from the Family and Community Engagement office of

Worcester Public Schools. She sent out our Book Nook idea to multiple Worcester Public Schools, and we got interest from the Columbus Park Elementary School's principal, Lisa Carignan. This is where we eventually built our Book Nook with our community partner, the Community Book Nook Initiative and its executive director, Beth Orsini.



United Book's Book Desert Map with Columbus Park Elementary School Marked with a blue dot

With our community partner and location setup, the next thing we needed was our research component. For this praxis project, our research and our intervention ran in tandem with each other. Since our intervention wasn't directly based on the research we were doing, we were able to build the Book Nook while collecting our data. So, although they are connected in idea and belief, the data was not directly tied to the design of the Book Nook, as the data was collected separately. Our data collection was in two parts: an anonymous online survey and a semi-structured interview (both sets of data were collected from full-time educators currently

employed in WPS). Our research was focused on understanding how teachers viewed the idea of the Book Nooks, and their view on literacy with these main guiding research questions:

1. How do Worcester Public Schools educators perceive their students' relationships to reading and literacy?
2. What impact do educators think a Book Nook being built at a Worcester Public Schools site will have on student experiences with reading?
3. What are educators' thoughts, opinions, and preferences regarding the implementation of a Book Nook within their school?

Although the research was done together, Gwenne and I also had separate research questions as we went, with Gwenne beginning to focus on reading for pleasure and book access as a whole, while I stayed on the teacher-student aspect of reading for pleasure and book access, and the importance of that relationship on the literacy development. Although our research questions diverged, our survey questions were preset to focus entirely on the original three questions, and our semi-structured interviews allowed us to get the data we were both interested in for our separate research questions.

This thesis will follow this project's two forms, the research component (the survey and follow-up interviews) and the physical component (the building of the Book Nook). Both of these components combine to answer these research questions and show the connections that are between literacy development in students and book access and for pleasure reading.

Literature Review

To write a paper about the importance of reading, it is also important to do readings to support that claim. When viewing this project, the important sections to highlight are literacy development to clearly define what that means when used later in the paper, explaining book access and its importance, and for pleasure reading and what it does for students.

Literacy Development

When the term ‘literacy development’ comes up, it can be confusing. What do literacy skills really mean, and how do you develop them? Is it just being able to read words, or does it go further than fluency? Catherine E. Snow and Timothy J. Matthews (2016) divide the idea of literacy skills into two sections: constrained vs unconstrained. Constrained skills are defined as finite skills that can be taught easily to students (the alphabet, common spelling rules, phonemes). There is a ceiling to how far these skills can grow, as they can be perfected.

Unconstrained skills are broader and less defined. It refers to knowing vocabulary, background knowledge, being able to engage in deeper text understanding, and skills that don’t have a cap on how much they can grow. These authors highlight how unconstrained skills cannot be taught all at once, and are grown gradually by both the outside factors of students’ lives (family, social status, location), as well as indirect instruction from teachers. These skills are indicators of high comprehension and the ability to analyze more complex texts. Snow and Matthews focus on these skills in terms of third graders, specifically how developing unconstrained skills after third grade should be a focus, as that is when those with underdeveloped unconstrained skills begin to fall behind.

In this paper, I will recognize both constrained and unconstrained skills as important components in my definition of literacy. When I say literacy skills, I will be referring to this combined definition. In many of the interviews conducted, when educators refer to literacy skills, they are often referring to this definition, even if they are not directly using these terms.

Book Access

When covering book access, I do not simply mean having books in a space. A student could be given a million books, but the content of these books is an important part. Part of book access is having a wide range of literature available for students, books that represent them and are multicultural as well. The difference in book access is often tied to the financial environment, with lower-income areas often lacking the resources. Shana Pribesh, Karen Gavigan, and Gail Dickinson (2011) cover how these gaps affect students and why they need to be addressed. It has been shown historically that schools with higher poverty rates have limited access to library resources (such resources include larger book pools, longer hours, consistent staffing), if their schools have libraries at all.

Students need spaces like libraries to have access to books they can use to better themselves, and to embrace the different kinds of literacy. “Research suggests that students who have access to print materials are more likely to read, thus improving their reading motivation and achievement” (Pribesh et al., 2011, 145). Although students have access to more information due to the online era we are in, the benefits of a physical library are not to be ignored. With well-funded libraries that have book options, students are able to explore books that align with their identities, not just old books that ignore these issues. Having places like libraries, the students do not have to do the work of trying to find literature (which could deter them from

finding books as they are forced to), but can be given freely to them. It stops students from falling away from literacy due to the ‘work’ of finding a book before they even know if they enjoy the genre, author, or reading level.

For Pleasure Reading

What is reading for pleasure? Is it just reading a book you like, or is there another element to it? And why should you care? Reading for pleasure is choosing to read in someone’s free time of their choice. It is the idea that you are not reading something just because it is required in a way, but of your own free will. There are times when what ‘for pleasure reading’ means becomes a little blurry (if told to pick any book to read for a book review assignment, does it still count as for pleasure reading?), but it is often defined by being done in free time. Reading for pleasure is not just good because it provides entertainment, but there is personal and academic growth that can be made by participating.

In a study conducted by Alice Sullivan (2015), she found that reading for pleasure helps individuals in both their youth and adult life. There were direct ties between growth in skills and for pleasure reading rates. It was seen that “reading for pleasure was linked to greater intellectual progress, both for vocabulary, spelling and mathematics. And reading for pleasure made a very substantial difference – around four times greater than the difference made by having a parent with a degree compared to having parents with no qualifications.” (Sullivan, 2015, p. 5) Books act as a bridge more than anything else, including parents’ education. Reading skills are one of the great equalizers; they help fight against the oppressive nature of the world.

For-pleasure reading is something important for all ages to participate in, as the benefits don't end when people leave school. Reading for pleasure has declined from elementary to

secondary school, so it is important to develop the skill of reading for pleasure. The world has many distractions from pleasure reading (phones and the internet, tv and the constant forms of entertainment), so getting students to read for pleasure in their youth is very important. Having regular access to books can promote these, and education can help keep students reading for pleasure by supporting the students in finding books.

Although the type of reading that is done for pleasure does seem to have a slight effect on the benefits, it is not such an effect that reading the ‘wrong’ for-pleasure genres negatively influences or negates the positives. Reading for pleasure is something that only positively benefits individuals throughout their lives, so encouraging children to begin finding the love of reading younger can only prove beneficial.

Why Does This Matter to Us?

When it comes to analyzing the project and research of this thesis, these pieces serve as support pillars for what I am theorizing and analyzing. These sources support the ideas I will be presenting and serve as the foundation I will be building off of. There were many sources on these topics in the general sense, yet it was hard to find others with the same focus as this study. Literacy development was, and its importance varied from article to article, with many only focusing on constrained or unconstrained skills, not both together; book access was tied to academic access, and for pleasure reading varied in definition and goals in so many papers. That difficulty highlights the importance of this research, which combines and covers all these ideas. These literatures are not perfect; the literature development sections have strict ideas of when these skills have to be learned that ignore the nuances many Worcester students deal with (it claims constrained skills need to be mastered by the third grade, but this is not realistic for many

students who are coming from multilingual households, or are new to the country). The book access section talks about the importance of book access for impoverished communities, but offers little in terms of short- or long-term solutions that can benefit the students.

For-pleasure-reading is also a phrase that has a level of vagueness that is difficult to pin down.

Theoretical Framework

Systems Approach

When approaching this project, there were many moving and undefined parts to the problem. When trying to solve a problem as big as literacy and book access, it is easy to fall into rabbit holes about the issue. For this project, we focused on literacy access for youth, and this problem can extend far beyond the grasp of a praxis project. The issue of Worcester youth not having access to books can be connected to funding issues from the government, which can then go into the issue of racism and the lack of funding BIPOC communities receive, while also being tied to the lack of funding public schools get from the government. The wide scope of the issue's causes means that finding the point that we could address with this project could easily become lost. This is why using the system approach was important to maintaining control over what the issue is, what we could do to address it, and what was out of our control.

The system approach I used is based on Gordon K. C. Chen's "What Is the Systems Approach?" in which he explains problem solving with the systems approach as follows:

In problem-solving, the crucial question is not just whether we are dealing with the total system or where we draw the system boundary, but what proper entities and attributes of the system should be. In other words, the important question is whether or not we have identified the right problem (Chen, 1975, pg 33).

There are two main types of problems: type I problems (goal-changing), where there is a new desired state of change with system design and synthesis, and type II problems (goal seeking), where a state is wanted to be maintained with system analysis and maintenance.

Based on this framework, this project falls under the type 1 problem type as it is a goal-changing problem, which has a new desired state that is analyzed to maintain feasibility. The desired state of affairs is having students have access to books of their interest, with the actual state of affairs being that students did not have access to these books in their schools, so the problem at the time was getting these students access to these books. Using this framework was important to keep control of what we could and could not address through our project. It was not just used on the overarching issue of the project, but also as a guiding force when analyzing the data as to what was part of the issue we wanted to address, versus an issue that is related but outside our grasp.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

When addressing the data from this project, an important element is how the educators' interview answers are informed by their teaching and how this teaching is informed. Part of this data is the idea of teachers using pedagogical content knowledge to respond to their students' needs to adapt their teaching (specifically their literacy). Pedagogical content knowledge (often referred to as PCK) is how teachers' understanding of their students' learning styles and struggles, their students' background knowledge and cultures, and the overall difficulty their students could face, shapes their teaching styles. PCK highlights content as important; its "development is rooted in teachers' specific professional contexts and influenced by factors such as characteristics of the school culture and its population, available time, and local support for professional development" (Van Driel, 2011, p. 27).

Many teachers engage with pedagogical content knowledge without directly naming it. None of the teachers interviewed named PCK as an influence/teaching style, but all their

interviews had mention of practices that fall under PCK. They mentioned offering different styles of reading for their students' different needs (audiobooks, English reading), which falls under PCK teaching.

The reason I highlight PCK is to emphasize how teaching is constantly evolving, and there is no such thing as an expert teacher. The teachers who filled out the survey and were part of the interviews had a wide range of teaching experience. Classroom space and students are constantly changing and evolving so teachers are always adapting to their different students' different needs. This project uses PCK when discussing teachers' teaching strategies, and uses PCK when developing the Book Nooks itself.

Critical Literacy

The problem this thesis addresses, and what we hope the Book Nook will achieve, is gaining greater access to interesting and multicultural literacy, which will improve literacy. The stance taken is that book access is a tool for promoting literacy. While access alone may not address all of the concerns related to literacy development, it seems a critical component. If someone does not view reading and associated skills as important, they will never care to address what is causing the decline. The baseline literacy skills I covered in the literacy skills are the baseline skills needed to be able to read, not why they are important in life moving forward. With the idea of proving the importance of what this project is trying to promote, the critical literacy framework is an important element in framing this project as a whole. As explained by McMillian and O'Neil (2012), critical literacy is the skill of being able to analyze and question text, being able to recognize how the use of language affects a piece of writing. Critical literacy gives people the ability to read beyond the text's direct sentence, but understand the deeper ties

that the reading might have. Critical literacy understands the social, political, and economic backgrounds that exist in literacy and pushes to understand those from within the text, even if not directly stated.

McMillian and O-Neal emphasize how important critical literacy skills are for developing free thinking. They posit that critical literacy is essential for people to develop to fight against oppression.

“Access to literacy- specifically critical or social literacy- provokes thinking that can change how an individual perceives the world. This change, for those of the dominant culture, is politically dangerous. The oppressed of the world realize that literacy is a weapon against hegemony. Literacy is their ticket out of the slavery of industrialization and labor camps that exist today.” (McMillan & O’Neil, 2012, 38)

Critical literacy is a skill needed for all individuals, especially developing individuals like students in school. Critical literacy highlights how literacy is not just a skill needed for being able to read signs, but is also needed to create well-rounded individuals in society. Having literacy skills allows for students to build critical literacy skills (to read beyond text and understand the dynamics in play needs to be baseline comprehension before they can advance to critical literacy), something all students need, but especially students in underprivileged communities. These skills, especially highlighted by the quote above, are what empower people to make the change they want to see in the world. We live within a world where we need to decode text and understand what we are reading past a surface level due to all the misinformation being spread around so speedily, so critical literacy skills need to be built.

Methods

Methodology

The data collected was a mix of both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey sent out was mainly quantitative, as we had the educators rate their thoughts and opinions on a scale, with one optional fill-in section to write out a response. Although this data is important to what we did, the more in-depth data from the interviews is what I focused on in my analysis. Our data is under the mixed method as it uses both data collection forms. A mixed method is defined by its usage of both forms of data collection, holding a balance between these two methods, justifying the order, and knowing why you collected both data points rather than just one (Lingard, 2008, 460). We specifically started with the survey to gather an understanding of multiple educators, as well as acting as an access point to the interview. Filling out the survey first gave educators insight into the topic that would be discussed in the interview. The survey had to be first as it was a stepping stone to the interview, where the opinions shared on the survey could be explained; it would not have worked flipped as the educators would have had to simplify their answers given in the interview to fill out the form. Although in the analysis I focused on the interview data, the original survey was still important to the data collection aspect and therefore remains a mixed methods study.

Our final piece of qualitative data (email with the school principal about the Book Nook in use) was collected at the end of the project with Principal Lisa Carignan sharing her thoughts on how the Book Nook had been used.

Epistemological Stance

When looking over the data, something important was understanding that this data was a one-sided story only from the interviewee's perspective. Any stories or descriptions of curriculum that are shared have to be taken as the teller's subjective truth. Constructivism is the idea that knowledge is not just discovered at once and is true, but is constructed by individuals from their own experiences. The truth is not just one fact but is based on one's socialization and their context within a situation (Yilmaz, 2008). This stance was taken when looking at the data we collected, as the answers we received were not "right or wrong," but the educator's view was informed by their experience.

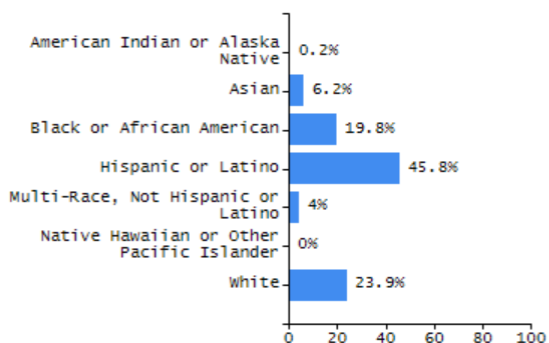
None of the data we received was questioned in terms of its "truth," but taken as the truth of those whom we interviewed. Since we were not fact-checking everything the educators said, it is important to remember that when looking at the data, even if you disagree with something, that does not make it any less important data for us.

Project Site

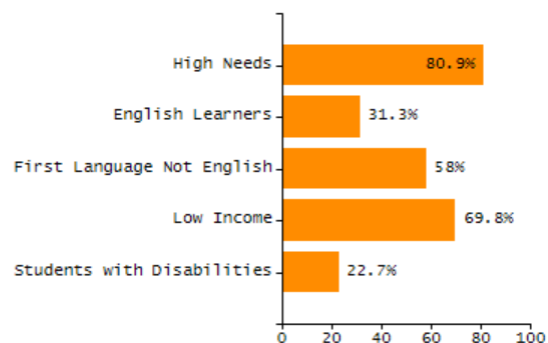
Research Site

The research site for this project was the Worcester Public Schools (WPS) in Worcester, Massachusetts. Participants were full-time educators currently employed in WPS. WPS is a high need area, with a majority BIPOC and high needs population. The district contains 47 schools with over 24,677 students in those schools.

Student Race and Ethnicity



Selected Populations



(Massachusetts School and District Profiles, n.d.)

Staffing Data by Race, Ethnicity, Gender by Full-time
Equivalents (2025-26)



	District	State
American Indian or Alaska Native	4.1	159.3
Asian	68.3	3,441.4
Black or African American	176.6	8,217.0
Hispanic or Latino	502.6	10,652.4
Multi-Race, Not Hispanic or Latino	27.4	1,080.7
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2.9	99.4
White	3,219.6	124,587.5
Female	3,154.3	117,133.1
Male	844.2	30,967.1
FTE Count	4,001.6	148,237.7

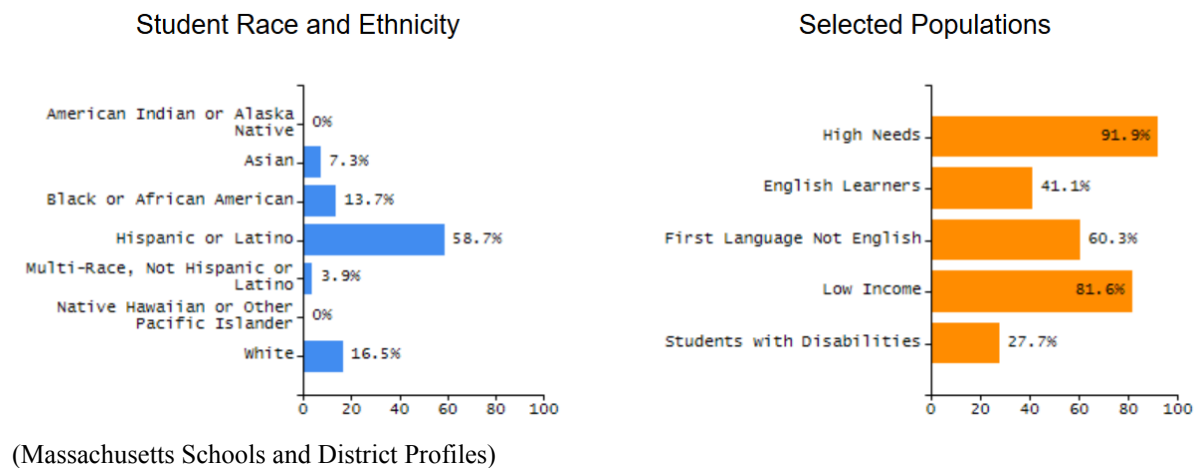
(Massachusetts School and District Profiles, n.d.)

One element of this site is that although the student population is highly diverse (76% BIPOC, 58% from Multilingual homes, 70% low-income, etc.), the teaching staff is still majority white (over 80%). This means it is likely our data is also from a majority of white educators. This distinction in identity between the staff and students is important to hold as the staff, although part of the school system, do not have the same experience as their students.

Intervention Site

Our community partner was Beth Orsini, founder of the Community Book Nook Initiative, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit which works to address “book deserts” by installing Book Nooks in schools without in-school libraries. A Book Nook, for this project, is defined as a small, designated space within a school that contains age-appropriate and culturally relevant books that students may take without the expectation of return, along with comfortable child-friendly seating and a comfortable environment for them (Community Book Nook Initiative, n.d).

This Book Nook was built in Columbus Park Elementary School (75 Lovell St, Worcester, MA 01603) with support from the principal, Lisa Carignan. We connected with Columbus Park on May 7th 2025, via Worcester Public Schools’ Co-Director of Family & Community Engagement. This school is situated within the Book Desert, as depicted in the introduction to this paper. The school has a large BIPOC population and many low-income families.



Columbus Park did once have a library, but due to the growing population size of the school, the library had to be turned into a classroom. The only reason we were able to build the Book Nook in its own room is that the room was not big enough to function as a classroom. This

meant we could turn it into a Book Nook and a zen room, which was a great opportunity, but the fact that we had this chance because this school had an “unusable” space is important to acknowledge. Many schools would love to have something like this Book Nook to enter their school, but the lack of available space can be a significant constraint.

Positionality

Research Positionality

We approached this research as students at Clark University, and I as a future educator. When this project began, Gwenne planned to work as a K–12 librarian (although her plans have diverged to a more specialized librarian study, meaning her focus shifted, but this did not affect the research or my work), and I plan to work as an elementary school teacher. My connection to the site is both academic and professional. I am currently preparing to enter a teacher licensure program to train to be an elementary educator. I share an academic background with participants, as I have begun taking classes towards this same master’s program from which we recruited them. My current preparation for this program has enabled me to tutor two children in a nearby elementary school, and I have observed and taught lessons in a 6th-grade classroom in another elementary school. These experiences afforded me a deeper connection to Worcester schools and students. But given my short time overall within this school district, I do not see myself as an insider in their schools. I am not currently employed within Worcester Public Schools, nor am I teaching in a classroom full-time, so although I have interacted within the school system, I am not inside the system. Our connection is not entirely insider or outsider, with more than just surface level connection to WPS, yet remaining not yet part of the system. This meant I needed

to be respectful of the community I was interacting with while still being willing to enter the space and help form the Book Nook and question the educators interviewed.

Intervention Positionality

The positionality of the intervention location is similar to my position within the research site (the connection to WPS while not being a true insider), however my distance from Columbus Park is further, as I had never done work within this school before. The positionality in this circumstance also has another layer, as Beth was a part of the intervention, adding another outsider to this situation. Much like Gwenne and me, Beth is an outsider in Worcester, but she has helped build Book Nooks in many other Worcester schools and was a teacher for many years, giving her an insider connection to the school system and the issues we are addressing with this project.

Participants

Research Participants

Participants are full-time educators currently employed in WPS. We recruited them through an email list maintained for graduates of the Master of Arts in Teaching in Education program at Clark University who currently teach in the Worcester Public Schools. These participants could be teachers of any grade within the Worcester Public School system (kindergarten to 12th grade). We reached out to these teachers through Andrea Allen, in the MAT program at Clark, who sent the surveys to MAT graduates. This kept the survey anonymous, which means we were not able to determine much in the way of demographic information from our survey. We had 11 completed interviews, which was less than our original goal, which

shifted the focus away from the quantitative data as a focus. However, it is still important to acknowledge that part of the data.

At the end of the survey, we invited the teachers to reach out to us if they were open to being interviewed. While we did have four teachers initially reach out, we were only able to complete three interviews. To maintain confidentiality, I refer to the interviewees as Educator A, B, and C. Educator A has taught for over 8 years, with 5 years in Worcester public schools; Educator B has been a teacher for 2 years, and Educator C for 6 years. They all teach high school, ranging from 12th-grade English, early college English (Educator A), 11th-grade English (Educator B), and 7th-grade English, AP Lit, 11th-grade English, Honors 12th-grade English (Educator C).

Intervention Participants

Unlike the survey, which had specific qualifications to be a participant, the intervention had participants by proxy of the intervention. Since we built a resource open to all students and teachers within Columbus Park, they all became participants from being members of this school community. The participants have a domino effect of connections; the Book Nook has an effect not just in the school but continues outward to the homes of the students who take books with them.

Research Data Collection

There were three types of data collected. First, there is the survey data, which included both quantitative data questions (having teachers rate how much they agree with a point on a

scale from 1 to 10), multiple-choice questions, and open-ended qualitative answers. The interviews were an optional follow-up.

When it came to the “data” of the intervention, there was no set data result, as there were no direct follow-up interviews with any students or educators from the school. The data we could collect were anecdotes from Principal Carnigan, which are covered in the Findings section (see below). These anecdotes were given to us via email, a few months after the Book Nook had been fully constructed. There are also photos of the finished Book Nook in the findings section as well.

Research Data Analysis

For the data analysis, I chose to view the data we received, the survey and the interview, as two interconnected parts. I am choosing to view the survey as an entry point to interviews, which is the deeper point of research. The survey is the frame, giving context for what the general population felt about the Book Nook and book access, with the interviews delving deeper into what informs these opinions. When organizing the data, I found four major topics that continuously came up in conversation: book access in schools, reading choice for students, the teachers' role in guiding students, and their overall thoughts on their students' literacy skills. These themes all intertwine with one another, as book access in the classroom affects how much reading choice teachers can offer, and their role in guiding changes about what options they give their students. Despite all coming from different teaching backgrounds, and getting questions that were worded differently/were changed between interviews, these themes constantly coming up made them the key points I analyzed when looking at the data. When combing through the data I also had to identify the skills I mentioned in my literacy review, even when the teachers

were not using those terms themselves. In the interviews, finding information about students' constrained and unconstrained literacy skills was easy to identify as the teachers directly stated when they were talking about literacy skills and I had to sort the constrained and unconstrained skills. When it came to the discussion of critical literacy and PCK it involved more steps on my end to mark what did and did not fall into these sections. When looking for critical literacy I looked for the teachers who supported their students advancing their understanding and giving their students resources to begin advancing their critical literacy (even if the teachers did not directly state that as the reason). When looking for PCK I tried to identify moments when the teachers were making changes to their lessons/sharing stories of adapting for their students.

Findings

Taking Action

The action of this project was to build the Book Nook at Columbus Park. This Book Nook was built in partnership with the Community Book Nook Initiative (referred to as CBNI). Gwenne and I partnered with Beth Orsini (the head of the CBNI) when the idea of the Book Nook began. After this partnership began and we were placed in our school, we began to organize funding and coordinate building information. During this process, Gwenne handled the majority of gathering grants, while I helped share our fundraising site. On the physical build date, I helped coordinate volunteers who came with Gwenne and me. The Book Nook was assembled mainly on one day, with a quick build finish on a later date, with Beth and her team to screw shelvings into the walls for safety.

Rationale

When it came to building the Book Nook, there were a few reasons we went with this specific book access path. As mentioned in the introduction, there was the idea of doing a free little library, but that was such a small amount of books we could install, we realized that we would not have the impact we wanted. The little library was easily obtainable for us, but would rely on people searching for it themselves, going against the access we wanted to create. The Book Nook is a size that can be more impactful for the students, as there are more books for students, and being in a school means it is easier for students to access.

As mentioned in the System Approach Framework, an important part of the Book Nook was deciding what was and was not in our control while designing and building the Book Nook. When designing, we were able to rely on our community partner, Beth, on best design choices for the space, so we were able to remove that from our system. Having CBNI to help with this project made it possible to create an entire Book Nook within the time constraints we had for our project. If we did not have a community partner, the project would need to be significantly changed to be obtainable for two college students to coordinate alone.

The Columbus Park Book Nook

The Book Nook was assembled in December 2025, right before Columbus Park's winter break, and was opened for use by students in January 2026 (although the official ceremonial opening was in February). It was built in its majority by a group of volunteers in December, with a later, smaller build date of just Beth and her team for safety review of the shelving by screwing it to the wall.

After the Book Nook had been open and fully in use, in March, the principal, Lisa Carignan, sent us an email to update us on the progress. I have included the entire email as I believe having the full context of how the Book Nook has been used is important to fully understanding the impact it had.

“At Columbus Park, the Book Nook has quickly become a favorite space for both students and staff. They regularly use it to check out books and enjoy selecting their own reading materials. Students feel proud when they choose books that match their interests. They visit the Book Nook not only to borrow books, but also to sit, read, and relax before taking books back to their classrooms. The Nook has grown into a warm and welcoming space that supports and encourages independent reading.

This experience has helped students develop a real love for reading. Many students are more excited when picking out books and like sharing what they are reading with their peers, families and teachers. More students are choosing to read during their free time and are becoming more confident readers.

Teachers are also using the Book Nook as part of their daily teaching. They bring their classes to choose books, support reading lessons, and connect books to grade-level topics. Teachers use the space for fluency practice and to give students more chances to read. The Book Nook helps teachers meet different reading levels and interests by offering a wide variety of books. Teachers have noticed that students are more motivated and excited about reading activities in the classroom. We also have some Spanish books in the Nook. These books help support language development and provide cultural representation for our students.

Overall, the Book Nook has made reading a stronger part of the culture at Columbus Park. We are also seeing improvement in our literacy data as students continue to build their skills because they have more opportunities to read. It is more than just a place to get books. It is a safe and calm space where students can grow as readers, make their own choices, and feel part of a community.” (Carignan, Personal Communication, March 3, 2026)

This email response is everything we hoped for this Book Nook. A difficult part of this project was the fact that once we built the Book Nook, we lost all control on how/if it is used. There was no more designing or tweaking we could do to make it more welcoming or easier to use, so this email showed it touched on every part we had hoped, the book access, book choice/for pleasure reading, and all the literacy skills that it supports.

This response showed that the book access has affected the students. Although we had other people’s research, having this email gave us insight into how the Book Nook actually works. We built this to give students access, and not only do they have access, but they are using it. The book variety allows all the students to use the space, and teachers help make sure all students find books they can use.

Students are also now given access to reading-for-pleasure book choices, specifically those with more multicultural representation. Students have begun to use the multicultural books, and although we do not know, based on this email, whether this was student choice-led or they were guided by teachers, what is important is that they were able to gain access. It is important for a school with such a high number of BIPOC and MLL students to provide access to books in which they can see themselves represented.,The student can see their culture represented, making it easier for them to become attached to the stories and reading in general. This representation in

literature is not always accessible, as much of this representation in youth-centered literature is from newer books, which are harder for students to obtain in underfunded classrooms.

All of the above benefits contribute to these students developing their literacy skills. The literacy skills data from students showing improvement in their abilities supports that data from the literature review highlights the importance of book access. All the theorizing we had done about what this Book Nook could do was proven with this statistic being shared. The access to the Book Nook helped improve literacy, showing not just the impact of book access, but also the influence that access to *for-pleasure*-reading books had.

Photos from the completed Book Nook (Taken in February 2026):



These pictures represent not only the hard work we put in, but the elements I've mentioned as important previously. Instead of describing what it looks like, these photos illustrate better than any words what the space truly is. As seen in the photos, we had multiple different seating styles. We understood that, as well as being a Book Nook, this space was a multipurpose space for the school. We had some traditional chairs, more comfortable couches, and some comfy floor seating. This is to help encourage students to use this space. The decorations were also used to make the space more comforting for students, encouraging students to actively use the space. The space starts in the hallway and then continues into the room, allowing students to see what the Book Nook has, even if they are only walking by. It can also be seen that the shelves are not simply stuffed with books, but have space on the shelves, with some turned on their side for students to see the books themselves. The space was designed to be inclusive, welcoming, and comfortable for students to use, and these pictures show that firsthand.

Frameworks In The Interviews

While interviewing the educators, there were a few themes that began to occur throughout all the cases. These patterns tied into many of the topics I covered in the literature review, along with my theoretical framework. The educators covered book access, what it means for students to choose books/read for pleasure, and the teacher's role in both these topics, as well as their students' literacy as a whole.

What About the Student's Literacy Skills?

In interviews about students' reading and their connection to books, it makes sense that students' literacy skills get brought up in the discussion. This section is specifically important for me to emphasize, as all these teachers are in secondary grade levels, meaning these students have already developed literacy skills for many years by the time they have entered these educators' classrooms.

All the teachers teach students who are over halfway through their public school education, yet many of the teachers raised concerns about their students' constrained literacy skills. There was much concern about students not being able to perform at a high school reading level, “I've found that a lot of students, they either they lack in those skills, or they lack the stamina might be the right word to apply them usefully.” (Educator A, Interview, 12/3). The educators pointed out how their students had trouble reading independently, could not read for more than a few paragraphs at a time, and overall lacked constrained skills that should have been mastered long before then.

This lack of skills is not just a reflection on the students now, but is also directly correlated with the students' prior reading skills not being developed when they were younger. Constrained literacy skills are supposed to be mastered by elementary school, and these skills not being finished by then having a negative influence on student's skills can be seen by these educators, “I see how they've developed as readers over time directly. And so yes, I can see the ones that didn't build up those skills younger [are] struggling to read independently now” (Educator C, Interview, 12/10). This lack of constrained skills is affecting students' independent reading, which means they will have trouble keeping up, even if they attempt to work outside of

class. It also likely affects their reading for pleasure, since reading for pleasure is independent reading.

It is not a surprise, but with a lack of constrained literacy, the unconstrained literacy skills are also lacking. Without constrained skills, it is hard for them to critically analyze the text. Even without discussing these ideas with the terms constrained and unconstrained, the interviewees explained the connection well. “Being able to read at a young age gives you such an advantage in being able to understand material, being able to express your ideas clearly and effectively, and you just build on that, those skills, and every day when you read, you, you learn not only what words mean, and things like that, but also, like, how they're used” (Educator B, Interview, 12/8). The skills need to be built as they constantly grow over time, so if they aren’t developed yet, the students will only continue to fall behind. Without developing the base skills it is impossible to build off them to continue developing, children have to cover the basics before building up their literacy skills. The Book Nook attempts to combat this by helping build these literacy skills in the students’ younger years. The teachers interviewed were high school teachers and to stop this problem from reaching them the Book Nook intervention occurs during the elementary years of the students' development. This means that by the time students enter these classrooms they will have been able to develop the literacy skills currently lacking due to the access the Book Nook gives them.

We covered in the literature review how important these skills are for students to develop, and the fact that these teachers worry about their students developing these skills helps frame how important the issues they bring up are. Their concerns need to be taken seriously as they do not just want more literacy materials so they have new items, but also because their students are struggling, and they need to be able to support them.

Without developing basic literacy skills students are unable to develop critical literacy. To be able to critically analyze text there has to be baseline skills to be able to dig deeper. If students are not able to advance their literacy skills they are unable to become empowered by critical literacy as they cannot fully understand more complex texts.

Book Access

One constant that came up, without even having to ask, was book access. All the interviewed educators touched on the importance of book access for their students. This access was mainly viewed through the lens of book access for curriculum/classroom-based learning. Suffering from a lack of access to required texts is concerning. If a school can't afford the required books, how will students get access to books for pleasure reading?

Teachers raised concerns that they did not have enough books for all their students, resulting in them having to take matters into their own hands. Educator C has curriculum autonomy, meaning that although he has to follow common core standards/framework, he has more choice in what he teaches than other teachers, but even with that, he still has to scramble to find books. For many of his classes, he wants to use books the students would be interested in, but still has to “put together a unit based off of what we had in a school and what is provided by the district. . . .I have a few like really old books that aren't complete class sets. And I ended up spending like \$100 or \$200 on getting other books So yeah, I went out and bought my own books. But we just find the funding to do it.” (Educator C, Interview,12/10). Even with a curriculum designed to give teachers freedom to design the class for the students, they cannot use it to the full extent, as they are limited by book access. This teacher took their own money to buy books for their students which is great to see, but probably not sustainable for the long term, nor

far for them to have to do. In terms of the systems approach, this teacher stepped outside of their system boundary (the classroom) and addressed the issue of providing books which is the schools' leadership system issue more than individual classroom. It is a nice idea but part of the system approach is maintaining feasibility, and this is not feasible for the long term of teachers to be constantly supplying books; nor is it a fair expectation to place on teachers. Teachers being limited in book choice in terms of what they want to teach is not the only book access limitation they face.

The Book Nook looks to bring book access to these students, taking the responsibility off of these teachers. The Book Nook entering these spaces also allows a wider selection for these students and teachers, and they both can discover new books as they are not limited by just the books their teachers know/have.

Book Ownership

Educators do not want students to have to rely on just borrowing books, but to have ownership of them. Although borrowing a book helps give students access to books, being able to annotate the book is something that is important for students as well. Being able to directly interact with the text helps students better understand the text, and having the ability to make direct notations also helps them grasp the content better and continue to work on the piece over time. To give students the chance to annotate, teachers will put in extra work to help give their students the chance, "For every text that I teach, I create my own digital copy of it . . . I put notes in there for myself. It's modifiable, you know, it's my own version of it" (Educator B). This is a great way to help give students a chance to annotate, but this access is not as impactful as having the physical book in hand. Students deserve to have access to what they need, "It's not just access to books, but access to books that they can annotate." (Educator A, Interview, 12/3). Annotating

can benefit these developing readers, so getting the students books they can annotate can help them improve their literacy skills. Being able to annotate the book gives students the chance to fully dig into the text and analyze its language. The opportunity to do this extended analysis gives the student the opportunity to develop their critical literacy skills as they can read deeper in the language and understand the author more.

Ownership also gives students freedom to write notes down to support their literacy development; they can return to the text multiple times with their notes already written, allowing them to build up their skills over time. The Book Nook is not just a library, but the students are able to take books home, giving them the opportunity to deeply analyze the books they take home. They are given the freedom to annotate, take their time with their reading, and going back to the text multiple times to dig deeper without the financial strain of having to source the books themselves. A majority of Worcester being in a book desert means these students lack access to books, not just in schools but in the city as a whole. This space does not just add books in the schools, but helps add books into the community by having the books enter the homes. More books circulate through Worcester schools and homes from having the Book Nook fight against the status of Book Desert by getting more books into the homes of the community.

Language Access

An aspect of book access that was not touched on as much in most resource material was access to books in multiple languages for students. Worcester being such a multicultural school system means there are many multilingual learners (MLLs), and coming into this data, I had assumed the goal was to have these students with English books for assignments, and using multilingual ones for reading for pleasure. Worcester's diverse racial makeup means they have a wide range of students who speak many different languages, making the access issue harder as

there are multiple languages to account for. My own privilege kept me from understanding how important it is for the curriculum to be multilingual as well. The educators understood this issue even if I did not, explaining how, “and so what I tell them is, I want you to use your native language as much as possible. And then let's work on you understanding how long it takes you to then translate into English and edit the translation. And so what I try and do is provide native language-based material as much as possible.” (Educator A, Interview12/3) and “I can also translate it into all the languages that I need to, so I always provide translated copies of the reading.” (Educator B, Interview,12/8). These educators understand that having students' translations is something they can benefit from, which I acknowledge is not something I fully understood, as I have not taught MLLs. This understanding of their students' linguistic needs shows how the teachers use PCK. Despite it not being in the curriculum and going against the typical class style these teachers make sure to provide MLLs with the supplies that will best improve their learning. This extra work of finding translations puts the student's needs at the forefront rather than letting the convenience of the English books be valued more.

The students' need for book access is not just about having the books, but books that are on their level and support them. Forcing students to try and read high level books in a language they are not as comfortable in will keep MLL out of higher classes they deserve to be in. Just because someone is better at reading in a different language does not make them less skilled in literacy. The idea of literacy being only in English is a value rooted in racism, and it is important, especially when speaking about a demographic like Worcester, to combat that idea. Getting students access to books in their first language is not an easy way out for them to learn literature skills in English, but it gives them a building block to move into their English reading.

Overall, book access for curriculum was something the teachers highlighted as a key issue within their classrooms. Although they combat it as much as they can, they clearly see how the lack of access can negatively impact their students. Everything these teachers are doing to support their students is great to see, but their approach is not sustainable long term. Book access is a major issue but the teachers should not be responsible for it because it is outside their problem system. Teachers show their understanding of their students and are willing to give their students the resources they can, but there is a lack in the system that they cannot make up for as individuals. The Book Nook entering the system is a way of taking this off of the teachers' plates (where it does not belong) and to fix many of their current issues. The design of the Book Nook gives students ownership, as they are allowed to take books home with them, giving them the freedom to interact/annotate the book however they need. The Book Nook also provides the students with culturally relevant and multilingual books for them to use, allowing them to develop literacy skills using books that support their needs.

Reading Choice

With the educators, reading choice had two main categories: reading choice for the students and reading choice for the educators. Originally, I planned to focus entirely on student choice, but while discussing with the teachers, the role of the teacher's reading choice came up and became an important topic for analysis.

Reading Choice for Students

Since a majority of the conversation revolved around curriculum and what happened in the classroom, when speaking of giving the students a reading choice, it was in more controlled situations. There was talk of reading for pleasure, but that is going to be covered in the teacher's

role due to how it was discussed. This section specifically covers how teachers support student-led reading choices while still maintaining their curriculum/teaching goals for the reading.

Educator C, who has curriculum autonomy, talked about the importance of giving students as much freedom as possible by explaining his literature circle/book club. He would give the students multiple book choices, “based off of your group can be as small as two as long as you have one other person reading the book that you do it. And theirs is all picked. And the assignments that they do are in common with other like the whole class . . . if this book club thing works with my AP kids, I'm going to find a more structured and scaffolded way to do it with my honors kids and let them sort of do their own thing” (Educator C, Interview, 12/10). The goal of a literature circle is to give kids the chance to read multiple different books that are of interest, and allows them to discuss the books in smaller groups where they have more opportunity to discuss the books with each other. Letting the students choose the books helped get them more engaged and created an attachment. Although this was allowed because of the curricular autonomy, a similar message was communicated by the other educators.

Educator A touched on a similar idea, even though they don't have the same curricular freedom. When they have more time, they try to give more choice to their students, “especially towards the end of the year is where I definitely try and get more from them in terms of like, what do you like to read? What can I help you work on? Like if you're going to do a project on any book you want, what's a genre that you like?” (Educator A, Interview, 12/3). Even when they aren't given as many chances to, teachers still attempt to give their students choices with their reading in the classroom, trying to fight against what many English classes have to, forcing students to read whatever the teacher gives them. Trying to give choice even in smaller ways

highlights how teachers see the choice as impactful and something important for their education. Giving students access to cultural books lets them explore and expose themselves to the world at large. It helps students develop a wider context for the world and give them knowledge that they might not be able to access otherwise. This will help students develop their critical literacy as they are able to bring more background information to the text they explore moving forward. A wide range of cultural books let them take the information between books to deepen the understanding of the context of the books. The Book Nook supports this want for book choice since it gives the students a space with a multitude of books for students to explore. The Book Nook also has duplicate books, meaning teachers can use the space for their book club style readings to support the curriculum as well.

Reading Choice for Teachers

All the teachers gave important insight into readers' choice; however, they all brought up the reading choices they wanted for themselves. The teachers also highlighted how they wished they were given more freedom in choosing readings for their students. They brought up how teachers cannot give their students choices without having choices themselves. The educators all wanted to bring in more culturally relevant books, and believed they could bring in books that fit better. Teachers want choice so they can “get more contemporary things in there that might fit the same thematic or analytical purpose that a lot of these other books have” (Educator C, Interview, 12/10). They believe they can help improve student’s opinions on literacy by getting books their students would like, while still developing the literacy skills the original books were used to obtain.

The reason teachers want choice is highlighted by this anecdote from Educator B. They share why the teacher having choice can support students since teachers understand what will engage their students.

“It's hard to get kids to enjoy reading in general, but I think that a lot of times it comes down to different texts for different students, too, you know, like a lot of the, a lot of the boys really like, like, the most dangerous game, because it's all, like, guys, and hunting, and stuff like that, and some of the girls are more drawn to, like, *The Great Gatsby*, or *The Raisin in the Sun*, and it's, like, certain things that are more, like, about, like, relationships, and, like, the dynamics between character, whereas, like, yeah, certain types of boys like all the action, you know, so *The Great Gatsby*, they all, they all kind of love *The Great Gatsby*. (Educator B, Interview, 12/8)

The teacher knows what kind of books their students can be drawn to, and if they can choose the books, they can use ones like *The Great Gatsby* that will attract all their students. This was the second teacher to bring us *The Great Gatsby* with Educator C saying they taught it to their students as well, having them look into the theory that Jay Gatsby is a passing man of color and pitching it as a saucy love triangle. Having two different teachers bring up *The Great Gatsby*, (a book that would have had me groaning in annoyance if I had to read it), and talking about how their approach to it affects how their students react to it shows how these teachers understand PCK. They know what their students like, and even if their students don't think they would be interested, their teachers understand their students and their culture and how to get them interested. Although this perspective limits student choice, it highlights the role of teachers and how they can help open doors for students in literacy that they might not have had interest in before then. Teachers receiving reading choice connects to the larger topic of the teacher's role in

literature and literature development.

The Teacher's Role:

Something that came up multiple times that I was unprepared for in collecting this data was the role of the teacher. I have previously mentioned that I am preparing to become a teacher, and yet I was not prepared for the discussion on the teacher's role the way it came up. In all the topics discussed, the main connector was what the teacher's role is in these issues. Obviously, the educators we interviewed are teachers speaking about their experience teaching, so it makes sense that their information comes from a place of putting value in the teacher's role, but it seemed to go beyond that. The role of the teacher in literacy is both in the classroom and in supporting the students in the literacy journey beyond just their reading in the classroom. These teachers can help make or break their students' literacy trajectory, as students need the guidance these teachers provide. As Educator B put it:

I think that they get discouraged. I mean, by 11th grade, a lot of the time, these kids have been not really fully supported in the ways that they need to for years, and so they just kind of have developed a mindset that they're not going to be supported, they're not going to be able to understand the materials, so why bother trying, and so some of those kids are some of my least motivated students, but some of them, it's the opposite, too.

(Educator B, Interview, 12/8)

The teachers know the support their students need and are working to be that support. Their students might be coming into the classroom with a lack of motivation, but the teachers understand their students' context of these emotions. Understanding why students are coming into the classroom with a defeated attitude allows the teachers to work to undo these mindsets and be the support that their students need. This understanding shows their PCK skills as they are

understanding their students' background and taking this context into the classroom. Rather than punishing students for lacking motivation, they take the time to understand their students' needs and how to address the root issue rather than force them to push through it and not make any changes. This understanding also can help them guide their students to the literacy that can support them (in both their literacy needs and as an emotional support).

The teachers try to make sure their classrooms are a place for their students to learn the best they can. They want their students to do well and are working to make it into a place where they can teach their students without students shying away from their education. One way this was done was by Educator B:

I try really hard to make sure it's a shame-free space in that regard, too, because that can be really intimidating and embarrassing for a lot of kids who, like, they know they're not good at it [reading fluency], and they can immediately tell, you know, if some kid's like snickering or giggling while they're trying to read, then that, I think that's really embarrassing for them, so I give a lot of dirty looks early on in the year when stuff like that happens, and usually over time, they get the message, but it's nice to have 11th graders, too, because they're a little bit more respectful, and they don't, they don't, they're starting to want to be seen as adults, and a lot of them don't act that way, but a lot of them respond well to a little bit of shame here and there, so a dirty look here and there when they're talking over somebody, or, you know, just a little, little things to let them know it's like, you're not acting like an adult right now, you know, is a properly utilized shame.

(Educator B, Interview, 12/8)

The effort to make their classroom a space where students can learn literacy is not just about the comfort of the space but also about what/how they teach, and how they encourage their students

beyond the curriculum. Shame is something that can push students away from education, so this teacher trying to keep that from their classroom allows students to continue to develop their skills. Although the usage of shame in the opposite way (to keep students from shaming others) is not something I agree with, this action shows how the teacher understands her classroom and how to keep students from shaming each other. This creates an environment where students can work to improve their fluency even if they feel they are behind. This teacher's understanding of their students' struggles and actively fighting against shows PCK as they address the root issue their students are facing (shame), instead of putting them in an uncomfortable situation, they are stopping the situation before it begins. Having a second space such as a Book Nook can also help fight against this shame as the reading and books are not tied to the educational space. There is not the same academic pressure in the Book Nook as there is in a classroom as it is not tied to a teacher or class. Students can read and interact with literature without being 'behind', taking social pressure away as well.

PCK and Scaffolding:

These educators best highlighted PCK with the scaffolding they provided for their students. All the educators gave examples of how they make changes and are willing to adapt for all their students (which follows PCK methodology even if they aren't directly citing it). Despite not using the term PCK, Educator B described it perfectly with their description of their teaching, "So, you have to kind of adjust almost on a kid-to-kid basis. I mean, you even have, you have, there's some kids who get very good grades in my school who are not necessarily the most intelligent or the most gifted students, but they are trying really hard every day . . . It's like a kind of meeting students where they're at sort of philosophy. " (Educator B, Interview, 12/8).

These teachers are also not stuck in the way they are teaching now; they are all willing to make changes. After describing his literature circle/book club system, Educator C specifically mentions “scaffold for my honors class, which is almost exclusively IEP students and language learners” (Educator C, Interview, 12/10). There is a desire to make changes to support their students and try new things, showing how willing these educators are to do what it takes for their students. Scaffolding a new system to try it for a new set of students (with no guarantee it would be effective), shows the teachers are willing to take risks with their teaching to try and support the students the best they can. They are attempting to solve a type one problem and are putting their entire curriculum plan on the line to fix it. Whether or not it works, it is adding extra work to the educator’s job (either having to undo the literature circle curriculum section, or having to add more) but they are trying to do what it takes to support their students. They are not trying to impose their way as the correct way, willing to take cues from the students, “I think that's the best part, and I never shut down a conversation if it's going well for the sake of time, so that's really been a game-changer for me reading-wise, because the kids know those breaks are coming, and they're building up towards it.” (Educator B, Interview, 12/8). Allowing students to talk endlessly might make the teachers seem like they are giving up power in the classroom, but only a confident teacher would be able to do this properly. Taking cues from students allows the classroom pace to actually support students, rather than rushing by to be “on track.” It involves the teacher giving up control but in exchange the lesson becomes more impactful and ultimately more beneficial for the students in the long term. It is a difficult line to balance, but if done properly (and willing to make the mistakes along the way) this could be helpful for the students in the long term.

A method Educator A and B both brought up was a break-based reading system, while students read in class. Both educators saw their students' attention spans being shorter and decided to address it in their teaching styles. They both saw the reading focus leave, with educator B noticing "if you just read straight at kids for 40 minutes straight, they're gonna, you're gonna lose a lot of them. So I think that what it does is basically we get to a stopping point every say 10, 15 minutes of reading, and something interesting has happened" (Educator B, Interview, 12/8). Along the same vein, Educator A saw "They're getting a better grasp of what's going on because it gave them a quick kind of like that like 15 to 30 second break to understand what's going on." (Educator A, Interview, 12/3). Both of these educators saw a problem and were willing to change their literature teaching to help their students with this issue, rather than forcing them to push through it and lose students along the way. They were willing to scaffold their entire lesson, and in a way that can support multiple students. Students who need more time to process and focus their attention can use the time to do so, and even those who might not 'need' the breaks can use them to use their unconstrained literacy skill and read deeper into the text. Allowing this space to use their literacy skills at their pace gives them time to develop these skills without feeling like they are 'holding the class back' or 'falling behind' as everyone is using this time. They saw the issue of attention to their students' pace, and wanted to adapt their teaching to give them time and breaks to grasp the concepts at the speed they need. The amount of time this adds to a lesson is hard to plan for, but their teachers' use of PCK allows them to adapt for their students.

These teachers' willingness to make changes and adapt to their students leads me to believe the Book Nook will be used. The teachers making changes shows they are willing to take

new resources and apply them to their students. With their knowledge of students' needs the teachers can help their students find books that can support their needs.

Reading for Pleasure

When discussing student-led choice reading and helping students read for pleasure, there was the most disagreement with the initial ideas I came into this project with. I believed that students should have access to books that they have an interest in and be able to get these books. To me, book access was meant to give students the chance to get any books they want, but the educators had a slight disagreement with that framing. They pushed back on just letting kids pick any book they want, as there can be many issues with it: "I don't want you to bite off more than you can chew, because a kid having a book that's not necessarily fit for their abilities or might be too long is like throwing a log onto a fire that you only just started to get going." (Educator C, Interview, 12/10).

This log onto a fire metaphor became poignant to the discussion of pleasure reading choices. While I originally viewed free book access as giving them all the tools to build their fire, I never considered how all those options could be snuffing it out. Having more options can overwhelm students, and they can choose something simply out of their level. As someone who dealt with this issue growing up, having a book you want to read but is out of your level is hard to take as a reader. It is frustrating to try your best for something you want and not get it. I can see why it pushes away students to face that, and educators can help intercept that disappointment before it occurs.

Teachers helping with pleasure reading is specifically to support getting students books they want to read, not just about controlling what their students read. The role of the teacher in this guidance is to "curate for the kids to, can, like, look at what they would enjoy better

sometimes than the kids can. Or if a kid grabs a book that is, like, far beyond their abilities, a teacher can help build them up to that by being able to choose other books.” (Educator C, Interview, 12/10). Using the word curate is specific as it is to help guide students to a book, but the student can still reject the book. For the book to remain for pleasure reading, the student can listen to the teacher’s guidance, but they still decide if they want to read the book recommended. The teachers have their ideas and recommendation but when it comes down to it, “when people enjoy, they are more engaged, so I think enjoyment leads to engagement, but engagement often does not lead to enjoyment, right, so if the kids are enjoying what they're doing, then they're going to be more engaged in the material” (Educator B, Interview, 12/8). Teachers have a level of experience with their students and literature due to their understanding of the subjects, and while they might know what in a book would engage a reader that does not mean teachers are experts on what books will lead to enjoyment. This difference is important to hold as just because a teacher can get their students engaged with a book does not mean they enjoy it. Enjoyment is not something that can be created as easily as engagement so although teachers act as a support in for pleasure reading discover it is important to not let their position of power in the dynamic overshadow the fact that the student’s enjoyment comes first in for pleasure reading, Teachers can find books they believe would be engaging, but it is still up to the students whether they enjoy them.

This guidance can help students in the Book Nook as teachers can act as support for when the students use the Book Nook. Rather than students getting lost in the space with so many books, teachers can help students find books that are a fit for them in both level and topic. Students don’t have to intimidated by the space, teachers can both encourage the students to use the space and help them within it.

The Data Supporting The Project

Although the research data were not directly connected to the intervention, it did inform and deepen the ideas and beliefs behind the actions. The two parts were done in tandem, the data collected was used to support the intervention and help gain an understanding of how this book access can affect real students. It is nice to give students new books, and while we had believed based on the research that something like the Book Nook would work, having real teacher insight was also important. All of the educators interviewed were in support of the Book Nook, giving us confirmation that the idea is supported by those in the school. While they did all support it, Educator A and B also gave us feedback on the idea, and specific items they agree with, not just total blanket support. The Book Nook, being a second space, not something in the classroom, was highlighted as a key concept that the educators support. “And I think that Book Nook, something like that would be really beneficial, especially if it's not an English class or only an English class.” (Educator A, Interview, 12/3). Making the Book Nook a space outside of a classroom is an important element to consider. Although literacy is inherently tied to English classes, and the teachers we interviewed are English teachers, reading does not only exist in an English classroom. Having literature be disconnected for a classroom space is important as it stops students from letting any negative experiences in English classrooms discourage them from reading. The educators understood this, and were clear in their support of the Book Nook as a second space, not just giving teachers books in their English classroom. It also helps keep the space accessible as it is not tied to a specific teacher or classroom, which could keep students who don't know that teacher from using the space.

Although they were designed not to be connected due to the timing, we were able to take some of the insights and apply them to the physical space in the Book Nook. One comment that was able to be applied to the Book Nook design was a suggestion from Educator A, who gave us ideas for organization in the space. They wished to see “some books on display that you actually can see the covers. Because oftentimes that's what brings them in. Because I've seen scenes like they grab a book like, oh, that cover looks cool.” (Educator A, Interview, 12/3). Since this suggestion did not alter any of the key details that required pre-planning (buying books and shelving), we were able to put it into effect and had key books set out on each shelf to entice students. Being able to get feedback like this is something that makes me regret not collecting data like this before we built the Book Nook, however it was just not obtainable at the time.

An Excuse to Talk About Me

Going into this, I believed the data would simply back up my beliefs. I thought my beliefs were “correct,” and hearing from teachers who have gone through much of the same education as I would strengthen what I already believed. This was not the case with all the data collected; although the core beliefs I held about the importance of reading did not change, the details of these ideas were deepened and given more nuance. Many of my beliefs were too simplistic; I always said it was important to get books into students' hands, but never thought beyond that. This project highlighted for me the gaps in my understanding and how I was being too idealistic about reading for students. As someone who loves to read, I was in the mindset that everyone just needed to find “the book.” However, the teacher interviews showed that there is much more behind finding “the book” (reading skills, book access, predisposition) than just picking one up and falling in love with it. This project, especially the research, put my beliefs to the test as there

was no longer a simple answer. Do my core beliefs about reading really hold true, or are they too simple? The core was true, but these educators forced me to think of the details. My idealized visions were challenged by educators showing the details of how these ideas are actually put into place in real schools.

My privilege of being in a well-funded public school was put into perspective as I did not consider how these classrooms do not have access to the books required for education, let alone for pleasure books. I also had not considered how multilingual learners reading for pleasure would be divided between reading in their first language (where they are comfortable and can enjoy the reading with less ‘work’) versus reading in English (which pushes their English literacy skills, but the extra work could make the reading less pleasure-based). There is no simple solution to these complex realities; each student requires PCK to fully help, but this project forced me to grapple with this. In many ways, this was a reality check for me entering my teacher licensure program, especially as an outsider in the WPS.

Okay, and So What? The Conclusion

Wait, So What Did You Learn?

The goal of this paper was to cover the importance of book access for youth, specifically for pleasure reading, and how this can improve literacy skills. The general backing from full-time researchers was covered in the literature review, where we learned what literature development was (constrained vs. unconstrained skills), what book access really means, and what pleasure reading does for students. The theoretical frameworks were used to explore the guiding principles and ideas I would be covering and how they would be applied to my research.

We then learned about the research. The research we focused on was to interview educators from three different Worcester secondary schools who all teach some form of English classes. I organized my findings into three main topics: book access, reading choice, and the teacher's role. Although they were analyzed separately, these ideas all feed into each other. The teachers want book access, which would give them access to book choice for their students. With more books in the classroom the teacher's role can be expanded as they will be able to connect their students to more books in terms of for pleasure reading as well as using more culturally relevant books in their teaching. From the role of the teacher section, it can be seen that what teachers want is to help their students, and all their concerns come from understanding their students' needs and issues.

There was also the building of the Book Nook, where we covered why we built a Book Nook and what it meant to build it. Although the data analysis of the teacher interviews took up more pages, the Book Nook is an accomplishment that cannot be understated. We were analyzing the research and the results of the Book Nook, both as individual elements, but also how they apply to each other. Although their tie is not direct, the data supports the ideas of the Book Nook

and the Book Nook is designed to address all the issues these educators brought up. The educators' concerns highlight why the Book Nook is needed as it addresses many of the issues these educators raised. The Book Nook is full of multicultural books; we specifically included books from Columbus Park's demographic so the students are able to read at whatever text level they need and be represented. The teachers can scaffold their recommendations for their students with the many book levels included. Teachers do not need to worry about a lack of access to books for their students' reading needs as they are provided from the Book Nook. The students can develop critical literacy with the multitude of books provided and gain a wider understanding of the world around them through literacy.

We are now in the conclusion section (you can let out a sigh of relief, I understand), where we are wrapping it up! We are going to take everything we have discussed and discuss what it means moving forward in the world. This research does not just end here, but has ramifications for future research, and we get to discuss all that.

What About The Theory? (Theoretical Implication)

A major shift that occurred from my initial framework was from the idea of pure 'free choice reading' to scaffolding and guided choices by educators. This shift might seem like it is moving in the opposite direction, but in reality, it is just clarifying and adding railings so students don't fall off. Free choice for students for pleasure reading is important, but as the educators clarified in the interviews, without guidance, book access can cause students to turn away from reading. Without guidance, youth will try to read books outside their level and can push themselves away from reading as a whole as they find it 'too hard'.

They shifted the stance of this paper from book access as a whole concept to book access in a way that actually supports students. In this we see that the idea of book access and reading for pleasure has to be integrated with PCK where teachers' deep knowledge of their students can help support and scaffold free choice. Although it was not purposeful, building the Book Nook in the school follows this new idea more than the original little library. The little library would have followed the idea of pure free-choice reading, with anyone able to grab any book, versus the Book Nook, which students would be entering with educators who can help guide them to books that are more within their level. The larger size of the Book Nook also enables educators to support children in selecting from a diverse array of levels and topics. This guidance will help students actually build their reading skills and grow as readers and individuals, while still growing a love of reading.

Implications for Practice

So many teachers would love to have every kid leave their classroom a skilled reader. No teacher goes into the classroom dreaming of having their students never learning to love reading or struggling to develop the skills associated with it. If given resources within the school, teachers are interested in getting books into students' hands; it is not a matter of if but how.

It is not as simple as building a Book Nook in every school; the individual needs of each school are an independent system, and the research we have conducted is not universal. However, the core of this project and its beliefs can be applied to all schools. There needs to be access to books where students can feel represented in the writing. Teachers will be there to help students within this access to find the right books for them, but teachers cannot do that until they

have easier access to books. It is not *whether* the Book Nook will work, but *how* something that offers book access easily to students can be replicated in other schools.

Worcester's book desert status is not something fixed by one Book Nook, it is not going to get 100+ books into every home but it begins to circulate books in the community. The books do not stay static in one school, but go into students' homes which they can continue to spread from there. Getting students books is not something that should only be happening when they are in the school, as that limits who has access, letting the books be removed from the Book Nook adds them to the homes around Worcester. Worcester's book desert status is tied very directly to the economic status of Worcester. The cost of new books can be a lot for a family, meaning they are less likely to be buying many new books. These families rely on their schools to help their students get access to texts, so the Book Nook acts to get these families new culturally relevant texts that they might not be able to access otherwise.

As someone who wants to go into teaching, specifically in Worcester, understanding these topics is important for me. I have to be able to handle these intricacies with my students, so being faced with this now can help me better prepare for my time in the classroom. I need to prepare for facing students who need extra support, specifically language issues, as it is something I do not have personal experience with, so preparation is necessary. Although these have not gone into practice yet, next year I will enter a classroom as a teacher and can begin to apply what this project has taught me. I need to do more work on educating myself as well as my teaching skills, to make sure my privilege growing up does not cause me to ignore or incorrectly address multicultural students' struggles. I cannot let my ignorance of how to handle these issues hurt my future students. I aim to be a resource for students to support their literacy journey; even if I do not always have access to the books to get them directly in the students' hands, I can help

be a stepping stone to meaningful book access. My goal is to create a classroom with books students can borrow and take home, give them ways to access books free online, and teach them about how to use the library so they can use the local library even if the school does not have one.

What Held Us Back, and How This Could Grow

This project's research and intervention were focused on Worcester schools, with research from Worcester teachers who were educated in a single Worcester university, and an intervention that was implemented in a Worcester school. This alignment made our research especially well-suited for our intervention; however, it also means that our findings are entirely specific to this location. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Having data that so closely matches the context of the intervention helps demonstrate why the intervention works in this setting. If we had conducted one part of this project in Worcester and other parts elsewhere, the connection between the data and the intervention would have been weaker, making the overall project less cohesive.

Worcester's demographics are highly diverse, representing many different languages, nationalities, races, cultures, and socioeconomic classes within a single city. Because our data is so locally specific, it is harder to use this project as a direct case study for other areas. Even within our data, the large quantity of identities meant we could not cover identity-specific topics, only the broad idea of "BIPOC identities." If we had done more in-depth interviews or interviewed students of varying identities, we might have been able to get more identity-specific data from these students. The student's racial identity is an important aspect of this project, giving them access to books that represent their culture is a major part of the Book Nook's

mission. We worked to combat this lack of specific data by using the demographics of Worcester and Columbus Park when designing the Book Nook and analyzing the data.

Another limitation we faced was that this was an undergraduate project completed over three semesters, during which it had to be designed, researched, executed, and written up as a thesis. This is the largest project I have completed in college, and there were many learning curves throughout the process. Even now, as I finish the final stages, there are things I would go back and do differently. I would better prioritize the project's different needs, focusing less on some areas and giving more time to others. When working on this project, I was very focused on getting the physical aspects (organizing the Book Nook, getting the IRB approved) done first, meaning the writing was pushed to the side until the last semester. If I were to reset this project, I would do much more of the assignments in tandem, and use my break (summer, between semesters) to focus on my writing, and would organize how those physical aspects tie into the writing, so once finished, I would be able to add them to my writing immediately. I would also attempt to be a better project partner to Gwenne. Although the project was successful and overall we were good partners, there were many times when I could have stepped up to be more proactive to help Gwenne. While it is always true that hindsight is 20/20, the scale of this project made it especially challenging to manage, particularly because it was so different from any previous work I had done.

Time is a perpetual enemy of life, and it got in the way of this project, too. Although three semesters seemed like a long time at the beginning of the project, balancing this project alongside being a full-time student, a part-time worker, in-club leadership positions, and personal responsibilities made it difficult to accomplish everything we initially dreamed of. At the start of the project, we had so many goals/ideas that we had to scale back to keep our focus. For

example, we originally wanted to collect 40 survey responses, but we ended with just over a quarter of that number. In the same vein, we had fewer interviews than originally planned and were only able to interview high school teachers, rather than teachers across multiple grade levels. Despite these limitations, I am proud of what we were able to accomplish. Given the constraints we faced, this project exceeded my expectations, though there will always be the question of what more could have been done with additional time.

I hope this project can serve as a starting point for others with similar interests in literacy research for youth. Many of the challenges we faced were due to entering the project with ambitious goals but limited experience. I hope that the research we have conducted can provide a foundation for future students, making it easier for them to build on our work without having the same difficulties we had. Our community partner, Beth, expressed interest in connecting future students with their praxis projects, which can continue to put Book Nooks in Worcester schools. Future researchers could expand on this study in different directions, such as exploring the English curriculum and its impact on readers, examining student-teacher relationships more deeply, or studying how these relationships influence student development beyond literacy. If the research that we have done for over a year can help someone else even start their project, and the Book Nook can help inspire a kid to become a reader, it will have been worth all the work it took.

Closing This Chapter

As the reader, the fact that you sat through an entire thesis (that is over 60 pages) shows you have a strong reading background. This paper sourced multiple high-level academic concepts, something that not every person can just pick up, read, and fully understand. Being

able to digest long academic papers is not something everyone can just do; it takes strong literacy skills. You might not always be conscious of how strong your literacy skills are, or how often they come into play, but these skills are used constantly. Being able to build these skills is something many people take for granted, or simply don't realize how much work it took to get there. These skills are easier to develop and maintain for all people if they can develop reading skills from a young age. It might not be as easy as just putting a book fair up at a school, but fighting to give students access to literature that can help them develop an enjoyment of reading can help with much more than just helping kids pass ELA classes, but can make them more full, well-rounded individuals.

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