The Reluctant Reader: Strategies to Engage Male Junior Elementary Students in Reading

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Abstract

Strong reading skills are an integral part of students’ success both inside and outside of the classroom. Research has shown that male students tend to exhibit lower levels of reading literacy and overall literacy achievement as compared to female students. The research also suggests that this gap in achievement between female and male students is partially the result of male students’ lower level of reading engagement, and higher levels of reading engagement have been shown to be related to high levels of academic achievement.

This qualitative research study focused on learning the various teaching strategies, resources and challenges teachers use and encounter when promoting reading engagement amongst their junior male elementary students in the classroom. Data was collected through two interviews with teachers in two Toronto school boards. The findings from the study suggest that teachers are using a variety of instructional strategies and resources in their practice to effectively engage male students in the reading process. They also emphasize the importance of teachers being cognizant of the challenges of engaging male students in reading to be better prepared to offer students effective instruction.

Key Words: Literacy, Reading Engagement, Male Junior Elementary Students
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Strong literacy skills are an integral part of students’ success both inside and outside of the classroom. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) defines literacy as the ability to read and write, and details the essentiality of strong literacy skills in Canadian societies. A child’s reading literacy significantly impacts their academic and future success as the ability to read influences an individual’s ability to fully engage and participate in the social and economic aspects of society (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Research has shown that early success in reading helps to foster a habit of reading, and has proven to be an essential skill for an individual’s academic and lifelong success (CCL, 2007; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Kennedy, 2004).

Reading is an essential part of education; it can be defined as the understanding of, and engagement with, texts of different kinds (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). A student’s ability and success in reading should be of the utmost importance to elementary school teachers, especially junior elementary teachers, as reading plays an increasingly central role in every aspect of learning as students enter the junior elementary grades (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Provincial standardized tests, such as the Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics in the Primary and Junior Division by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), indicate that in the school year of 2013-2014, 79% of Grade 6 students achieved at, or above, the Provincial Standard in the Reading component (EQAO, 2014). This means that 21% of Grade 6 students did not meet the Provincial Standards, indicating a need for further investigation into strategies that can function to improve reading success of students in grades 4 to 6 (EQAO, 2014). It is important to improve students’ reading success, as it is a significant
contributing factor to a student’s overall academic and literacy success (Brozo, Sulkunen, Shiel, Garbe, Pandian & Valtin, 2014; Cooper, Moore, Powers, Cleveland & Greenberg, 2014; Gambrell, 1996). Reading and literacy play such a vital role in a student’s overall academic success as they provide the very foundation of education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

One significant aspect of reading achievement is reading engagement. A number of studies have documented the value of reading engagement in promoting reading success (e.g., Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Wigfield, Guthrie, Perencevich, Taboada, Lutz Klauda, McRae & Barbosa, 2008). Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009) found that students who were disengaged readers experienced more difficulties learning in the classroom. Furthermore, students who exhibited high levels of reading engagement demonstrated higher levels of reading achievement and academic success than their less engaged peers (Ibid).

Students’ motivation and engagement in reading plays an important role in their reading development (Gambrell, 1996; McGeown, 2013). Students’ engagement in reading can be understood as a multidimensional attribute that includes behavioural engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement; that is, students who are engaged actively perform their learning tasks, they use high-level strategies that foster deep learning, and they tend to enjoy completing academic tasks and express enthusiasm with regards to their learning (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2008). Reading engagement therefore is a significant contributing factor to students’ success in reading, their literacy success and consequently their overall education.
1.1 Research Problem

Students’ engagement with reading has become an increasingly important problem in the classroom environment. More specifically, the issue of boys’ reading literacy achievement, as it relates to reading engagement, is of great concern (e.g., Brozo et al., 2014; Cooper et al., 2014; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). The issue of male students’ difficulties with low levels of reading and literacy success is evident from international tests, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which indicate that male students consistently achieve low reading literacy scores relative to female students (Brozo et al., 2014; OECD, 2014). According to the results of the 2009 administration of the PISA, as compared to the results of the 2000 administration, female students continue to outperform male students in literacy and reading achievement in every participating country (Ibid). The OECD (2014) posits that this gender gap in reading achievement is the result of a variance in students’ level of reading engagement.

The issue of low levels of reading engagement amongst male junior elementary students is one that warrants further attention. First, the pattern of female students outperforming male students with regards to reading literacy has been consistently observed for over forty years (Hedges & Nowell, 1995). Second, Scholastic (2014) conducted a survey to investigate attitudes around reading of children ages 6 to 17. According to their findings, the degree to which boys enjoy reading has dropped from 20% in the year 2010, to 12% in the year 2014 (Ibid). Furthermore, research shows that male students are three to five times more likely than female students to have a learning and/or reading disability placement in school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000), as well as twice as likely as female students to be diagnosed with dyslexia (Klinger, Shulha, Wade-Woolley, 2009). Male students also tend to achieve lower
scores on standardized tests with regards to language arts (Klinger et al., 2009). There is a need for teachers to address these problems by working to increase male students’ level of reading engagement in junior elementary classrooms. An investigation into methods and practices teachers employ to engage male students in grades 4 to 6 in reading, as well as an exploration into the perceived effectiveness of these strategies on improving male reading and literacy levels would be helpful for beginning teachers as they develop their repertoire of teaching strategies and techniques.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify successful strategies used by a set of exemplary teachers to engage male junior elementary students in grades 4 to 6 in reading to improve their reading and literacy achievements. Furthermore, this study sought to discover challenges teachers experience when implementing strategies designed to improve male students’ reading engagement. The information gained from this research will provide insight into my own teaching practices as a beginning teacher.

For the purposes of this qualitative research study, reading achievement will be defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skills essential for full participation in modern societies as well as a student’s ability to extrapolate and apply key understandings both inside and outside of the school environment (OECD, 2014). Many definitions of reading engagement have been proposed. For this study, reading engagement will be defined as a student’s behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement and involvement with a text (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2008). These definitions were selected as they best represent the various elements that comprise success in the classroom as well as the various components required to be an engaged reader.
1.3 Research Question

The main research question guiding this study was: how is a sample of exemplary elementary school teachers engaging male junior elementary students, in Grades 4 to 6, in reading? An exploration into the strategies teachers use to engage male students will provide insight for new teacher candidates, such as myself, into effective strategies currently in use by teachers. An understanding of these strategies will provide teacher candidates and beginning teachers with the opportunity to help their students more fully engage with reading to promote higher levels of student success in reading and literacy.

1.3.1 Subsidiary Questions

In addition to the main research question, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What specific strategies are teachers using to engage male junior elementary students in reading?
2. What resources are teachers using to help promote male students’ engagement with reading?
3. What perceived benefits do teachers see amongst their students by encouraging reading engagement?
4. What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing strategies designed to engage male junior elementary students in reading?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

I have always had an interest in reading in the elementary classroom. When I was a student in the primary grades I quite enjoyed reading and looked forward to our designated reading time. However, as I transitioned into the junior grade levels in elementary school, I began to face challenges in reading and became disengaged from my work. As a result I was
placed into a remedial reading program designed for students at various reading levels. My love for reading grew from that point on and I believe I was able to surmount the challenges I faced in school because I had the extra support and encouragement from my teachers as I faced my obstacles in learning to read.

I was very privileged to have had the opportunity to have teachers that believed in my capabilities and potential, and worked to foster a love of reading in me. As a beginning teacher, I have developed a strong interest in learning how I can support my students and engage them in reading through the use of effective teaching strategies so as to provide them with a strong foundation for their education.

Additionally, I believe it is important that I am receptive and open to various strategies teachers use to engage male students in reading. As a female, my particular experience may differ from that of male students. I believe it is important for me to be aware of this fact and to ensure I am open to the information in the research and what I learn from the teachers participating in this research study.

1.5 Overview of the Whole

This research was conducted as a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two teachers. One in-depth semi-structured interview, and one email-based interview, were conducted with the teachers to learn effective strategies they employ to engage male students in Grades 4 to 6 in reading. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review. The focus of the literature is on research that has examined the relationship between reading engagement and reading and literacy success; the difference in literacy achievement between male and female students; and strategies designed to help facilitate and promote reading engagement amongst male elementary students. In Chapter 3 I describe the research design used for this study. In
Chapter 4 I report the research findings and discuss them in relation to the literature, and in Chapter 5 I discuss the implications of the findings for the education community and my own practice as a beginning teacher.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The issue of boys’ literacy achievement is of great concern as poor literacy skills can significantly impede a student’s success throughout their education and throughout their lives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Research shows that male students experience lower levels of literacy achievement as compared to female students, and a significant contributing factor to this struggle is their lack of engagement in reading (Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This chapter sets out to review the literature in the areas of reading engagement and literacy achievement of male junior elementary students. The literature review examines themes related to the importance of reading engagement to academic success, and the difference in literacy achievement between male and female students. More specifically, this literature review examines strategies presented to educators to help facilitate and promote reading engagement amongst male elementary students.

2.1 The Importance of Reading to Achievement

Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of reading in academic achievement (e.g. Brozo et al., 2014; Cooper et al., 2014; Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie, 2001; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Trehearne, 2005). Trehearne (2005) argues that literacy provides the very foundation of the educational system and can therefore be seen as the foundation of a child’s education. The pursuit of high literacy achievement amongst all students is of the utmost importance as a child’s success in literacy impacts their success and achievements across all subject areas (Ibid).

One significant aspect of literacy is reading. Research shows that a strong foundation in reading is necessary for successful learning to take place in the classroom (Ontario Ministry of
Education, 2003). A student’s reading practices, including their reading ability and engagement, therefore significantly contribute to a child’s success in literacy and helps to provide the foundation for achievement throughout a student’s academic life (Cooper et al. 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Trehearne, 2005). Elementary school teachers in particular have a responsibility to assist students in developing strong reading skills. The development and continued improvement of students’ reading skills in the elementary years has been shown to positively influence student achievement throughout their educational career (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003).

Reading not only affects a child’s academic success, but also affects a child’s entire life. Strong reading skills allow students to adapt to the social and economic demands of a modern, complex society that is predicated upon strong literacy skills (Cooper et al., 2014). Children who struggle with reading are therefore more likely to encounter more challenges in multiple aspects of their lives. In order to help prevent these challenges, research into strategies that promote and nurture reading at a young age is essential.

One method teachers can use to help promote the academic and literacy success of their students is to promote reading engagement in their classrooms. This is especially important in the junior elementary grades as students are often directed away from familiar narratives, and reading takes on an increasingly central role in every aspect of the students’ learning (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). A high level of reading engagement has been shown to be related to high levels of achievement (Brozo et al., 2014; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; OECD, 2014). Research has shown the link between reading engagement and academic test scores across various school subjects (e.g., Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). For example, Campbell, Voelkl and
Donahue (1997) conducted a study that analyzed the connection between reading engagement and academic achievement amongst students aged 9, 13 and 17 years of age. They found that students who had higher levels of reading engagement had higher levels of academic achievement than students who were less engaged readers. They went on to do a cross-age comparison and found that highly engaged 13-year-old students experienced higher levels of achievement than 17-year-old students who were less engaged readers. Furthermore, this study found through the examination of national data, that engagement in reading has helped students compensate for low family income and low family educational background (Campbell et al., 1997). These findings demonstrate the impact engaged reading can have on achievement outcomes. Often a low socio-economic status or family educational background can negatively affect the educational attainments of a student (Campbell et al., 1997; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009), however reading engagement can function to help counter these negative effects.

2.2 The Gap: Difference Between Male and Female Literacy Achievements

The relationship between gender, reading engagement, and literacy achievement is a dynamic topic that has been studied for decades. Studies examining data from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), have all reported that male students tend to exhibit lower levels of reading literacy and overall literacy achievement as compared to female students (Booth, Elliott-Johns & Bruce, 2008; Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Gender therefore can be viewed as a significant contributing factor in reading achievement.

Brozo, et al. (2014) conducted a review of the 2000 and 2009 administration of the PISA cycles. They reviewed these two cycles as reading literacy was the main focus of the
assessments. The PISA tests students from different countries in math, science, and literacy, and disseminates the results to inform elementary and secondary education systems of areas of strengths and weaknesses amongst students and how they compare on a global scale (Knighton, Brochu & Gluszynski, 2010). The PISA results from the 2009 cycle revealed that the gender gap in achievement in relation to reading had persisted from the previous literacy-based assessment cycle in the year 2000. In fact, the gender differences in achievement had increased since the last reading literacy cycle in 2000 by an average of 10 points (from 29 in the year 2000, to 39 in the year 2009) across the 65 OECD countries that participated (Brozo et al., 2014). The OECD is the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which sets out to promote policies designed to improve the social and economic well being of communities across the globe (OECD, 2014). The fact that a gender gap in reading achievement was evident amongst 65 OECD countries, and the fact the gender differences in reading achievement increased over a span of nine years is concerning. It demonstrates the need to identify strategies and techniques teachers can use to assist students in improving their reading literacy.

The EQAO has reported similar gaps in achievement between boys and girls in literacy test scores (Booth et al., 2008; Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2014). For the school year 2003-2004, 49% of the grade 6 boys did not meet the Provincial Standards in the reading assessment segment of the test (Booth et al., 2008). This trend has persisted and was evident across Canada as the results from the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program showed that girls achieved higher levels of reading success than boys (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The results from the most recent EQAO scores for the school year 2013-2014 indicate that the gap between male and female students has decreased, however, 21% of grade 6 students are still achieving below the Provincial Standard (EQAO, 2014). Although the gap appears to be closing,
it is important to continue to help every student achieve high literacy success, and this can be accomplished through every teacher helping their students become fully engaged readers.

The continued gender gap in reading performance and achievement is troubling. First, as reported by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2003), children who encounter reading difficulties in early elementary grades rarely catch up later in their educational career. Therefore, it is important to target intervention strategies designed to improve reading success at an early age. It is particularly important to target strategies that help male students in the junior grades as some male students begin to disengage and face challenges with reading as they enter Grade 4 (Brozo, 2005), and reading takes on an increasingly central role in the junior elementary grades (Brozo, 2005; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

Secondly, the gender gap in reading achievement is problematic as research has shown that Canadian students who scored in the bottom quartile of the PISA reading assessment had a higher probability of dropping out of secondary school and were less likely to complete one year of post-secondary education than students who scored in the highest quartile (Knighton et al., 2010). These trends in male reading achievement need to be reversed to promote the academic and lifelong success of all students. Although research continues to highlight areas of concern and the need for action with regards to improving male reading success, there is a need for further research that focuses on effective strategies designed to improve junior male elementary students’ reading achievement and literacy success so as to set the foundation for lifelong academic success.

The 2009 PISA results indicated that reading engagement had one of the strongest links to reading achievement in all of the 65 countries that participated in the assessment, and that the gap in performance between male and female students in reading literacy could be explained by
their difference in reading engagement (Brozo et al. 2014). Booth et al. (2008) found similar findings in their research as they noted that boys’ lack of engagement in reading is a significant contributing factor to their underachievement in literacy as compared to girls.

2.3 Reading Engagement

Research supporting the importance of reading engagement is vast. It has been shown time and again that engaged readers experience higher levels of reading achievement, and success in education, the workplace and society (e.g. Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie, 2001; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). An examination into the importance of reading engagement for male junior elementary students, as well as factors that affect male engagement in reading are discussed below.

2.3.1 The Importance of Reading Engagement for Male Junior Elementary Students

While research has demonstrated the potential benefits of high levels of reading engagement, the results of numerous academic assessments (e.g. PISA, PIRLS, EQAO) indicate that female students continue to experience higher levels of achievement in literacy (Brozo et al., 2014). Furthermore, research suggests an increased level of reading engagement could account for the variance in levels of reading achievement between male and female students (Brozo et al., 2014).

Reading engagement can positively impact a male student in many ways. Guthrie, Schafer, and Huang (2001) found that engaged readers have a high potential to overcome obstacles to achievement and therefore become instruments of their own academic growth. Engaged readers are often driven to use strategies taught to them to gain conceptual knowledge while reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Therefore the use of instructional practices that promote reading engagement and strategies designed to help students understand the reading
process are valuable at all levels of education. The use of effective instructional strategies designed to promote reading engagement are even more valuable in the junior elementary levels as a decline in reading engagement, and overall attitude towards reading, occurs during the junior elementary school years (Guthrie, Cox, Anderson, Harris, Mazzoni, & Rach, 1998). If male students become engaged readers at the elementary level, their high engagement levels could be expected to continue throughout their education and therefore potentially lead to improved levels of academic achievement, and could help close the gender gap in reading achievement (Brozo, 2005; Guthrie et al., 1998; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

Teachers should engage in proactive practices to encourage the reading engagement of male students. As Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) wrote, “Engagement is the avenue through which instruction impacts outcomes. Students grow in achievement, knowledge, and practices as a result of their increasing engagement” (p. 417). Students who are not engaged readers are less able to comprehend, critique or compose text, and are less likely to engage in cognitive reading strategies (Guthrie et al., 1998). Disengaged readers may therefore experience more difficulties in the classroom environment and greater challenges in their educational career.

Furthermore, through their investigation and analysis of the results of the 2000 and 2009 cycles of the PISA, Brozo, Shiel, and Topping (2007) found that reading engagement has the ability to compensate for factors such as low socio-economic status, and poor educational background that can otherwise have negative effects on the academic performance of students. Reading engagement has the potential to compensate for low socio-economic status and poor educational background, as highly engaged students often provide themselves with self-generated learning opportunities as a result of their reading practices (Ibid). Teachers must be aware of the implications of reading engagement on student achievement so they can incorporate
effective teaching strategies that promote engagement with reading both inside and outside of the classroom.

2.3.2 Factors that Affect Male Engagement in Reading

To provide teachers with effective strategies on how to promote reading engagement amongst male junior elementary adolescents, it is first important to understand the factors that affect male engagement in reading. One factor that influences male disengagement from reading is the fact that students are directed away from familiar narrative texts common in the primary grade levels to more informational and disciplinary texts in the junior grade levels (Brozo, 2005). This leads to a decreased level of engagement and achievement amongst some junior elementary students (Ibid). To avoid this potential decline in student engagement, Brozo (2005) suggests 3 guiding principles for teachers to follow in order to promote student engagement: (1) balance teacher and student-centered learning; (2) increase student choices and options; and (3) engage with the social nature of learning.

Failing to provide the opportunity to socially engage with a text can also negatively affect a male student’s level of engagement with reading (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Some boys need the opportunity to discuss their thoughts before they are able to truly understand and engage with a text (Ibid). Providing students with the opportunity to participate in productive social interactions and talk allows the students to become more involved and engaged with the text and reading process.

Research has also pointed to several other factors that significantly affect boys’ engagement with reading. Henry, Lagos and Berndt (2012) examined factors that could positively impact boys’ engagement with reading. Through an examination into the literature and informal discussions with librarians, male students and their care-givers, Henry et al. (2012)
found that shared experiences in reading, male mentors, and the use of technology all encouraged male students to become engaged readers. They found that engaged reading occurred when boys felt the reading material reflected an image of themselves, or when the students had the opportunity to share their reading experiences with others as they felt they were able to make a connection to the text they were reading (Ibid). The use of technology can also potentially play a role in encouraging male students to engage in reading as it presents boys with the opportunity to engage in various, non-traditional forms of texts (Ibid).

The need to address strategies that function to engage male students in particular is not unanimously supported. Some argue that establishing strategies targeted for male engagement functions to promote gender binaries in the classroom and emphasizes a more masculine-centered school system (Martino & Kehler, 2007; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum & Lankshear, 2002). However, when teachers and educators are aware that the effectiveness of different reading engagement strategies may be related to gender, teachers are better equipped to provide all of their students with equitable and proper learning opportunities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

### 2.4 Strategies to Engage Male Readers: What the Research Says

A number of strategies have been proposed to assist teachers as they engage their male students in the reading process (e.g. Brozo, 2005; Klinger, Shulha, Wade-Woolley, 2009; Miller, 2002; OME, 2003). Two main areas of the research are addressed in this section: (1) the role of the teacher and teaching strategies used to improve male students’ levels of reading engagement; and (2) resources available to teachers to support reading engagement amongst male students.
2.4.1 Role of the Teacher & Teaching Strategies

Teachers play a significant role in encouraging male students’ engagement in reading. Various teaching strategies have been proposed to help encourage engaged reading amongst male students in all grade levels. Few studies, however, examine the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting reading engagement amongst junior male elementary students (Topping, Samuels & Paul, 2008). General teaching strategies designed to promote reading engagement are presented here as beginning teachers have a responsibility to be familiar with various strategies to help develop their own repertoire of effective teaching strategies that facilitate male students’ reading engagement. Further examination into the use of these strategies in the classroom is required to add credence to whether or not these strategies effectively engage junior elementary male students in reading.

To begin, teachers have a responsibility to be lifelong and reflective learners; this includes participating in professional development so as to continually improve individual knowledge related to literacy achievement and reading engagement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Continued enhancement of individual professional knowledge helps to foster a positive learning environment that encourages the growth of both the teacher and the students. This is an important strategy for all teachers working with males in all grade levels. Additionally, teachers should understand the complex nature of the reading process and continually work to develop the skills necessary to implement effective reading instruction so as to provide students with a classroom environment that fosters reading engagement (Ibid).

Providing students with a variety of texts and the opportunity to choose a text to read is a critical element to promote engagement (Brozo, 2005; Miller, 2002). For example, in his research on “Avoiding the ‘fourth-grade slump,” Brozo (2005) spoke to teachers who observed
an increase in motivation and interest in their students when given the opportunity to select which text they were going to read. Brozo (2005) explains that as students enter the junior-level grades (i.e. grade 4), they begin to experience an increased level of choice outside of the classroom; allowing students to maintain a similar level of choice and options (e.g. through text selection) within the classroom is beneficial to increasing motivation and engagement in reading and the learning experience in general.

Students also need to have a wide variety of text types as well as have the option to explore texts of different levels of difficulty (Miller, 2002). This allows students to explore and discover new texts and to become engaged in the reading process (Ibid). The incorporation of talk into a reading program is another important strategy that engages male readers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Talk is related to the social aspect of reading that promotes engagement with a text (Ibid). There are a number of strategies suggested to facilitate talk in the classroom such as: small reading groups that include teacher participation, and group readings combined with taped stories (Ibid). The incorporation of these strategies could effectively help teachers guide male students through texts and promote a sense of engagement with the text. For example, Babbage (2000), as cited in Me Read? No Way!, a literacy guide created by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2004), found that boys became quite enthusiastic about reading and sharing their reading experiences when given the opportunity to talk with boys from another school about their books via e-mail. After e-mailing the students from another school, there was an increase in interest in reading amongst the students, including those students who experienced low levels of motivation and had poor reading levels (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). The inclusion of talk in the classroom can act as a powerful and diverse tool that helps to foster reading engagement amongst male students.
The teacher’s involvement in the classroom has a significant impact on engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Features of teacher involvement include establishing learning and knowledge goals that are co-created with students, providing students with autonomy support, engaging students with interesting texts, and providing students with strategy instruction (Ibid). These instructional practices support students both inside and outside of the classroom as they provide students with effective learning strategies. The inclusion of read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading should also be incorporated into junior elementary level classrooms to help facilitate male engagement in reading, which in turn could help improve their academic success (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Guthrie et al. (1998) outline nine design principles for reading engagement. Two of the principles clearly illustrate the role of the teacher in promoting male engagement in reading. First, teachers should promote the use of cognitive strategies (Guthrie et al., 1998). The teacher needs to support the students by providing them with various strategies for learning. These strategies include: modeling, coaching, explaining, practice, peer discussion and student reflection (Ibid). The incorporation of these strategies into teaching practices has the potential to positively influence male engagement in reading and consequently their literacy achievements. Second, providing students with structured time for engaged reading in the classroom has been shown to enhance student achievement (Ibid).

One of the most important roles a teacher has in ensuring boys’ success in literacy and promoting reading engagement is that the teacher must help their male students connect to the reading process (Werderich, 2010). To accomplish this, the teacher must value and acknowledge the responses and thoughts of the male readers, and must consider how students view themselves as readers (Ibid). Furthermore, it is important that teachers know their students. That is, a teacher
should know the types of readers in the class, the students’ habits, their strengths and their weaknesses as this will allow the teacher to differentiate independent reading to meet the needs of every student, and thus increase engagement in reading (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009).

Trehearne (2005) proposes a number of different reading strategies designed to help students engage with a text. Some of the reading comprehension strategies include: visualizing; predicting; activating prior knowledge; drawing inferences; identifying main ideas; summarizing/retelling; monitoring and revising comprehension; asking questions; analyzing; synthesizing; making connections and evaluating. Reading comprehension strategies can function to help engage students with a text as teachers support the learning of the strategies through demonstrations and modeling with the goal of students learning how to apply and use the strategies independently while becoming engaged readers (Ibid). Furthermore, the use of reading strategies in a reading program allows students to connect with a text in a unique way and thus can potentially increase reading engagement.

2.4.2 Resources Available to Teachers

A number of guides exist to assist teachers in promoting reading engagement amongst male students. In 2004, the Ontario Ministry of Education published the Me Read? No Way! guide designed to provide educators with practices and strategies used in literacy programs intended to stimulate an engaging learning environment for male and female students. Throughout the guide teachers are provided with resources and thirteen “Strategies for Success” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Some of these strategies include: visualization to enhance boys’ engagement in reading; literacy circles to help bridge the gap between the academic performance of male and female students; and the incorporation of technology and new forms of
texts to fully engage male students (Ibid). This resource serves as a guide for teachers to use to promote the literacy achievement of male students of all ages in the classroom.

A more recent publication of teacher resources includes the EQAO research guide *Towards an Understanding of Gender Differences in Literacy Achievement* (Klinger et al., 2009) which begins to address the contribution of reading engagement to reading success. Additionally, in 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education published *Me Read? And How!* as a follow up to the *Me Read? No Way!* resource guide.

*Me Read? And How!* is based on the Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project, a project that was designed to investigate the gender gap in literacy achievement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This guide further elaborates on the thirteen strategies presented in *Me Read? No Way!* and recommends additional strategies to improve boys’ literacy skills (Ibid). Although these guides are helpful, further attention and insight is needed into teaching strategies that specifically function to engage junior elementary male students in reading to improve their literacy achievements.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review examined research that looked at the effects of reading engagement on literacy achievement and the continuing gap in achievement that exists between male and female students. Furthermore, this literature review examined the role of the teacher in promoting academic achievement through reading engagement. There has been considerable attention paid to the gender gap that exists between boys and girls with regards to literacy achievements. Research also acknowledges the impact boys’ engagement in reading has on this gender gap. A number of studies and guides have acknowledged the importance of teaching practices that promote high levels of reading engagement amongst male students. Further
research in the area of teaching strategies that effectively promote reading engagement in male junior elementary students will be beneficial in assisting beginning teachers, such as myself, as they develop their own classroom practices designed to promote reading engagement and consequently the academic success of male students. As such, this research paper examines the teaching strategies two exemplary elementary school teachers implement in their reading programs and daily practice with the intent of improving the reading engagement of their male students. The study examines how the teachers implemented these strategies, the resources they used, and the benefits and challenges of engaging their male students in the reading process. Next, in Chapter 3 I review the research methodology.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the methodology used for this research project. To begin, I discuss the research approach and procedures, detailing my rationale for conducting a qualitative study. Following this I discuss my rationale for using interviews as the main instrument of data collection, and elaborate on the interview protocol. I then expand on the participants of the study, including an overview of the sampling criteria, the sampling procedures, and participant biographies. I describe the data analysis procedures used and review the ethical considerations exercised throughout the research process. Finally, I review the methodological strengths and limitations of this study.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

Due to the open-ended nature of qualitative research studies, researchers have the opportunity to explore aspects of human nature in in-depth ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). With this in mind, I elected to do a qualitative research study for my Masters of Teaching Research Project. In this research, I reviewed relevant literature in the area of literacy achievement and reading engagement of junior elementary boys, and conducted one face-to-face semi-structured interview, and one interview by email, with exemplary teachers. My study began with an initial review of the literature, where I became aware of prominent researchers in this field of study, such as David Booth, and John Guthrie. To ensure I remained up to date with the relevant literature, I continued to examine the literature throughout the entire research process.

According to Creswell (2013), researchers conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue exists that warrants an in-depth exploration, and a detailed understanding of the topic. Given the purpose of my research was to identify effective strategies current teachers use
to engage boys in grades 4 to 6 in reading, an in-depth exploration of this topic through the use of a literature review and semi-structured interviews provided me with the opportunity to fully immerse myself in the topic and to gain a greater understanding of strategies teachers use to engage their male students in reading. Furthermore, an important aspect of qualitative research is its focus on the lived experience, and the importance of individual experiences informing the research topic (Creswell, 2013). Interviewing exemplary elementary school teachers enabled me to more fully understand and explore my main research question. It also allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of effective strategies to use as a beginning teacher to engage boys in reading.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

There were two primary means of data collection used for this study. The first was a face-to-face semi-structured interview, and the second was an interview conducted by email. The main purpose of conducting interviews was to gather data from exemplary teachers to improve my own repertoire of techniques to engage boys in reading. The semi-structured interview was selected for a number of reasons. Interviews, in general, provide in-depth detailed information and valuable insights based on the wisdom and experience of the participants interviewed (Denscombe, 1998). More specifically, a semi-structured interview was used as it allowed me to enter the interview with a complete interview protocol (see Appendix B), while also allowing me to remain flexible throughout the interview and open to exploring and elaborating on ideas raised by the participant (Ibid).

The second interview was conducted by email to accommodate the needs of the participant. This means of data collection was selected as it provides an open space for dialogue that has no time constraints and provides the interviewee with the opportunity to reflect on their
responses (James, 2007). The interviewee completed the questions provided in the interview protocol, and follow up emails were exchanged to probe responses and to clarify meaning. The use of a semi-structured interview and an interview conducted by email for this research study were effective tools to gather information pertinent to responding to the main research questions guiding the study, namely, identifying strategies and challenges teachers encounter when engaging boys in reading. While there were key methodological strengths to conducting a semi-structured interview and an interview by email, there were some notable methodological limitations, including a loss of non-verbal and visual cues during the email interview process as well as time constraints during the semi-structured interview.

The interview protocol was separated into five sections to facilitate the interview process. The first section focused on the background information of the interviewee. This section was included as I felt it would help the participants feel more comfortable sharing their personal beliefs during the interview and provided me with some insight into the teaching experience of the practitioners as well as their school and classroom environment. Following this, I included sections focused on teacher practices, beliefs and values, and influencing factors (i.e. the what, why, how and who of engaging boys in reading). The final section of the interview protocol focused on the “next steps”, which allowed me to seek advice for beginning teachers who are seeking to include strategies to engage boys in reading in their classrooms.

3.3 Participants

For this research study, I elected to interview exemplary teachers who purposefully incorporate teaching strategies into their language arts programs with the intention of improving reading engagement of male students. To follow, I review the sampling criteria used for teacher participants, the sampling procedures used, and finally, I introduce the teacher participants.
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The following criteria was applied when selecting teachers to participate in the interview process:

1. Participants must have a minimum of five years of teaching experience in elementary schools.
2. Participants must have a minimum of two years of experience teaching language arts in a junior level grade (i.e. grade 4, 5, or 6).
3. Teachers will have demonstrated leadership, commitment, and/or expertise in the area of boys’ literacy and reading engagement (e.g. conducted and/or participated in Professional Development in this area, have developed curriculum in this area, etc.).

These criteria were included as they provided the opportunity to find teacher participants that could provide a range of experience and expertise while maintaining a strong focus on the research purpose and would help provide fundamental information in answering the main research question.

For the first criterion, a minimum of five years teaching experience was included because, as research has shown, teachers in their first year of teaching possess a more limited skill set and knowledge as they begin to develop their own understanding of teaching and learning in the elementary classroom (Shoffner, 2011; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011).

Furthermore, first year teachers often adopt a survival mode as a means to successfully complete their first year of teaching (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011), which suggests first year teachers may not possess the same expertise or experience more senior teachers may possess on the topic of reading engagement. With this in mind I thought it best to speak with teachers who have had more time to develop their knowledge and skill set as teachers. Additionally, the second criterion
was included as it was important to speak with teachers who have experience teaching language arts in the junior grades as it was imperative that the participants were able to speak about strategies they have used in their classrooms to help junior elementary boys engage in reading. The inclusion of this criterion ensured that the teachers were able to draw on examples from their own lived experiences in junior elementary classrooms.

Due to the small-scale nature of the study, it was also important to interview teachers who have demonstrated commitment and/or expertise in the area of reading engagement of male students to ensure each participant was able to draw on a wide range of teaching experiences pertinent to informing my study. Furthermore, it was important to interview teachers who demonstrate leadership in the area of boys’ literacy and reading engagement, by participating in professional development for example, as research has shown that continued professional development is essential to implementing effective instruction (Porche, Pallante & Snow, 2012). This suggests that teachers who exhibit a commitment to improving their teaching practices in this area would be exemplary participants as they would be able to share a variety of effective teaching strategies to engage male students in reading.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

With regards to the sampling procedures, there are a number of options available when conducting a qualitative research study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants for a study who are able to provide a clear understanding of the central research problem (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). While convenience sampling, on the other hand, involves selecting participants due to accessibility and feasibility (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).
Given the small-scale nature of this study and the methodological parameters of the MTRP, I elected to use purposive convenience sampling. To recruit participants I discussed my research with teachers at different schools who were recommended to me as potential participants by teacher colleagues. The teachers I spoke with appeared to demonstrate a commitment to reading engagement and literacy as some attended professional development conferences, such as Reading For The Love Of It, and others taught literacy programs such as Junior Literacy Intervention.

After discussing my research with teachers who demonstrated a commitment to literacy in the junior grades, I provided my contact information to individuals who expressed an initial interest in participating in the study. I then informed the potential participants they were welcome to contact me if they were interested in participating in the research study to ensure the participants did not feel obliged to participate.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Two teachers, Dan and Cindy (pseudonyms) were interviewed for the purposes of this study.

3.3.3.1 Dan

At the time of the interview, Dan had been a teacher in the Toronto District School Board for 30 years. He was selected as a participant as he has demonstrated a commitment to continually bettering his teaching practices, especially with regards to his reading and literacy program. Dan’s educational background was in literacy, and he had won recognition awards for his reading program. Dan had been working in a grade 6 classroom for the past 15 years, and so was able to share a number of examples of teaching practices he used to engage boys in reading. Dan had experience working with students from diverse cultures, socioeconomic status, and learning
abilities. He had worked in suburban schools, as well as inner city schools earlier in his career. Dan had a wealth of knowledge and experience to share during the interview as he spoke of his reading program and the challenges and successes he has experienced while engaging his male students in the reading process.

3.3.3.2 Cindy

The second participant selected for this study was Cindy. At the time of the interview, Cindy had worked as an elementary school teacher in the Toronto Catholic District School Board for 6 years. Cindy had a wealth of knowledge and experience in relation to literacy and reading instruction of junior elementary students. Cindy had taught language arts in Special Education classrooms, she had worked in the 5th Block Reading Intervention program, as well as the Junior Literacy Intervention program. Cindy had also worked in mainstream classrooms and had experience working with children from diverse backgrounds. Cindy expressed that she learned to value the importance of literacy to successful education during her Masters program, and as a result, she had devoted most of her professional learning to understanding how to better support students’ literacy development. Cindy was able to offer a wide variety of experiences and knowledge on the topic of reading engagement amongst male junior elementary students.

3.4 Data Analysis

To begin the data analysis of my research I transcribed the interviews. I then took the time to read the transcripts multiple times so as to become quite familiar with the text and details of the interview, an important step as described by Agar (1980) to ensure a proper understanding of the material being analysed. Following the phases of data analysis as outlined by Creswell (2013), I made notes throughout the transcripts and began coding each transcript using my research questions as an interpretive tool, I identified different categories of data, and classified
the data into common themes and divergences present in the interviews. Next I interpreted the data in light of my own views and perspectives, as well as the different perspectives evident throughout the literature (Ibid). By classifying, interpreting and identifying themes in the data I was able to make sense of the information I learned through the interview process and was able to use this information to inform my research purpose and my research questions (Ibid).

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Throughout the entire research process, I was aware of ethical considerations pertinent to my research. As discussed by Creswell (2013), it is important for a qualitative researcher to be reflective of their presence in the research, to be respectful of all relationships developed in the context of the study, and to be sensitive to the potential imbalanced power relationships between the interviewer and interviewee. With this in mind, I took several precautions while conducting my research.

To begin, when approaching potential participants, I ensured the individual was aware that participation was voluntary. To do this I provided each person with my information to contact me if they were interested in participating. Before conducting each interview I reviewed the purpose of the study and provided each participant with a consent form to sign (see Appendix A), giving their consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded. The consent form provided an overview of the study, addressed the ethical implications and specified the expectations of participation (i.e. a 45 to 60 minute semi-structured interview). Participants were also informed that there were no known risks to participating in the study and were notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research process.

While conducting the interviews I was cognizant of the complex relationship and the real and perceived power imbalances and dynamics that can develop between the interviewer and
interviewees (Creswell, 2013). To avoid a power imbalance I tried to make the participants feel comfortable during the interview. To accomplish this, I respected the wishes of one of the participants to complete the interview through email. Additionally, during both interview processes, I respected the participants’ views, beliefs and confidentiality, and I reminded participants that their participation was completely voluntary, and they were free to not answer a question if they wished. To ensure participants were comfortable sharing their experiences, each participant had the opportunity to review their transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before I conducted the data analysis. Participants’ confidentiality was also assured. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and no identifying markers of the person, their school or students were included. Furthermore, all data gathered for the study was stored on a password-protected device with access limited to my research instructor, and myself, and will be stored for a duration no longer than 5 years.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Given the ethical parameters of the MTRP, I was restricted to a single research method of interviews, and consequently was unable to speak with students or conduct observations in the classroom. Using a single research method represents a key methodological limitation of this study. Engaging in observations, or having the opportunity to speak with students as well as teachers, would have provided a more in-depth understanding and more varied perspectives and insights into the topic. The inclusion of multiple research methods and more varied participants (e.g. teachers, students, parents, etc.) is an area that can be further developed in future studies.

The use of an interview conducted via email represents another methodological strength and limitation of this study. Conducting the interview by email was a strength of this study as it provided an excellent medium to accommodate the needs of the interviewee. Additionally, the
interview was conducted by email as it provided a safe and open space for dialogue that had no time constraints and provided the interviewee with the opportunity to reflect on their answers (James, 2007). However, conducting the interview by email also contributed to a methodological limitation of this study; particularly, there was a loss of non-verbal and visual cues. Conducting the interview by email also made it more difficult to engage in follow-up discussions and clarification of meaning.

Additionally, given the small-scale nature of the study, my sample size was small. Although the sample size was small, it was appropriate for this study; the participants were exemplary teachers in the area of literacy and male reading engagement, and I gained valuable insight into effective practices I can use to engage male students in reading as I enter the teaching profession. Due to the small sample size, it is difficult to generalize the information learned, however as Creswell (2013) writes “the intent in qualitative research is not to generalize the information […] but to elucidate the particular” (p. 157). The use of an in-depth interview in addition to an email interview were key methodological strengths of this research study as the teacher participants provided in-depth information and unique insights as they shared their lived experiences.

3.7 Conclusion

This qualitative research study conducted one semi-structured interview and one interview via email of teacher participants who had experience teaching in a junior grade level literacy program that incorporated strategies to improve the reading engagement of boys. The data gained through the interview process was coded and organized according to common themes present in the data and the literature. Efforts were made to ensure participants were comfortable with their participation in the study. Participants were provided with a consent form.
that provided an overview of the research study and addressed the ethical implications of
participation. Lastly, this chapter identified areas of methodological strengths and limitations of
the paper and suggested areas for future investigation. To follow in chapter 4, I report the
research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the key findings from the two interviews I conducted with Cindy and Dan, regarding their instructional practices for promoting reading engagement amongst their male junior elementary students. Both teachers interviewed had strong opinions and beliefs as to the absolute importance of reading to the academic success of their students. After conducting the interviews, both data sets were transcribed and coded. There were four overarching themes that were identified through the coding process: (1) the instructional practices of the interviewees underscored the importance of incorporating multiple teaching strategies, ranging from teacher-centered to student-centered practices, with the purpose of engaging male students in the reading process; (2) teachers identified classroom-based resources as well as professional development as essential elements of their instructional practices designed to engage male students in reading; (3) teachers identified individual factors that supported male students’ reading engagement, such as parental involvement, as well as factors that challenge male students’ reading engagement, such as the home environment; and (4) teachers encounter challenges and barriers both inside and outside of the classroom environment when promoting reading engagement amongst male students. Below, I elaborate on the meaning and implications of each theme with regards to the literature review.

4.1 The instructional practices of the interviewees underscored the importance of incorporating multiple teaching strategies, ranging from teacher-centered to student-centered practices, with the purpose of engaging male students in the reading process.

A significant aspect of this research project was to learn about different strategies teachers are currently using in their classrooms to engage their male students in reading. Cindy
and Dan were both advocates of the importance of strong literacy skills in the classroom. Cindy believed that literacy, “encompasses all other subject areas”, and as a result, students need to have strong literacy skills to be successful in the classroom. Dan shared a similar belief in the importance and centrality of literacy to students’ education as he centred his entire curriculum around his reading component.

Both Dan and Cindy found that it was necessary to implement multiple strategies to promote engagement that were specifically targeted towards male students as they both had a number of students express disinterest in the reading process, and consequently these students experienced difficulties in their reading and academic achievements. For example, Cindy shared that many of her male students who were disengaged readers were also struggling readers. Cindy’s experience with her students reflects the findings in the literature review, that students who are not engaged readers are less able to comprehend, critique or compose text and are less likely to engage in cognitive reading strategies (Guthrie et al., 1998). As such, Cindy expressed that there is a need to use, “teaching strategies that are specifically designed with the male student in mind”. Both Cindy and Dan discussed a number of key engagement strategies they incorporated into their literacy programs, in particular they discussed their use of: (1) appealing to student interest and free choice; (2) using talk and social interaction; and (3) teaching reading comprehension strategies and using the gradual release model during instruction. Below I discuss the three key strategies they practiced in their classrooms and the perceived benefits of these strategies on male engagement with reading.
4.1.1 Teachers incorporated reading material and instructional practices that were based on student interest, and provided students with free-choice of reading material to encourage engagement in the reading process.

Throughout the interview process, both of the teachers spoke of the importance of knowing their students: the students’ likes, needs, interests, strengths and weaknesses; and tailoring their instruction to meet the interests and needs of the students. The importance of teachers knowing their students is reflected in the work of Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009), who found that when teachers understand students’ needs and interests and offer reading materials that align with these interests, teachers are better able to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of every student, and therefore increase reading engagement. In order to better understand the interests of his students, Dan developed a reading interest survey he administered at the beginning of the school year. He also conducted conferences with his students throughout the year to check in on what the kids were reading, if they were enjoying their texts, and what they were interested in reading next. With this information, Dan ensured that he always had a wide variety of texts and resources based on the students’ interests available in his classroom library for independent reading time. When students are surrounded by reading materials that are based on their interests, and given the opportunity to choose a text they are interested in, the decision of what to read ultimately comes from the student. The student is therefore not fulfilling any requirement in reading the text, he is simply reading for his enjoyment and is therefore more likely to be engaged in the reading process.

These teachers believed that appealing to boys’ interests functions to engage them in their reading as it provides them with authentic reading experiences. Dan spoke of his experience
integrating reading material into his literacy program that was based on the interests of the boys in his class at the time:

[…] it’s really important that we build a reading and writing program and provide opportunities for the children to read … something they can relate to. You know … their interests, and to make it as relevant and meaningful as possible. I guess that’s what you call authentic reading, something that is real world. For boys, for all students maybe, but for boys especially, they want to read about something that is real and authentic and relevant.

When boys are provided with the opportunity to read something based on their interests, something that is ‘authentic’, then it can function to engage them in the reading process as they are more invested in their own decisions. Cindy had a similar experience in her classroom. She struggled with a student who refused to read, however when the student was given the opportunity to read a text of his choice, she noticed he became engaged in the reading process. Cindy believed the boy became engaged because he was able to, “attribute his enjoyment to the reading itself [and] the decision to read came from him, not from an external source”. Providing students with free choice reading opportunities allows them the opportunity to read a book because they are interested in reading it, not because of a requirement.

Similar to the findings in the literature reviews conducted by Brozo (2005) and Miller (2002), which demonstrated the positive effects free choice and appealing to boys’ interests can have on their level of reading engagement, Dan and Cindy found that they were able to engage their students in a meaningful and authentic way when the students were given the opportunity to read a text of their choice that was of interest to them. They found this strategy to be especially effective in engaging their male students in reading. Teachers should therefore take the time to get to know their students, to learn the students’ interests and needs, and to give students the freedom to choose a text they want to read. In doing so, teachers need to value all types of
reading, including non-traditional texts, to give all of their students the opportunity to meaningfully engage with the reading process.

4.1.2 *Teachers prioritized the use of talk and social interaction in the classroom to foster male students’ engagement in reading.*

Studies have shown that providing male students with the opportunity to talk with their peers, to learn about their reading interests, and to engage in the social nature of reading, functions to spark an interest and engage male students in the reading process (Brozo, 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, 2009). The importance and value of engaging male students in talk and social interactions was reflected in both Cindy and Dan’s literacy programs, as a significant aspect of their literacy blocks was the incorporation of talk and social interactions. Dan and Cindy shared a common philosophy around the benefits and power of giving students authentic opportunities to speak about their reading, and to discuss their reading material with their peers. The methods through which Dan and Cindy promoted talk and social interaction in their classrooms differed. Dan had his class participate in Book Talks to encourage his students to share their thoughts through meaningful discussion and to promote social interactions between the students based upon a shared interest in a book. For the Book Talks, students read a book of their choice and would discuss their thoughts about the book with a group of peers. In their groups, students were responsible for discussing questions such as “Why did you like [the book]? What didn’t you like about it? Why did you select the book? Would you recommend the book to other people in your group? Why or why not?” Engaging reluctant male readers in Book Talks allows them to see their peers enjoying the reading process which can function to engage the disengaged reader.
Cindy also experienced positive reactions from her reluctant male readers when she engaged her students in talk and social interactions. The method through which Cindy implemented this strategy differed from Dan however, as she used more informal, small-group discussions to engage her students, as compared to the more formal and structured Book Talks Dan had his students participate in. Cindy found that when her students were given the opportunity to socially engage with a text, they were able to, “explore the concepts in a meaningful way”. Their resulting discussions around the text became quite enthusiastic and all of her students expressed an interest and desire to participate in the developing conversations.

Cindy understood the importance of social interactions in promoting engagement amongst her reluctant male readers. Studies have shown that some boys need the opportunity to discuss their thoughts before they are able to understand and engage with a text; failing to provide male students with this opportunity can negatively impact their engagement level with a text (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). To further facilitate talk in her class, Cindy would join her students in small group talks about a book they were reading as a class. She found that giving the students time to engage with their peers in an informal setting allowed their questions and confusions to surface, which she would then actively address with her students. Cindy’s practices and positive results reflect the work of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2004), which suggests that teachers should work in small groups with their students to facilitate discussion and to promote engagement with a text.

When teachers use talk and social interactions as a strategy to engage their male students it is important that they give their students time to meaningfully engage in their peer discussions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Students should have the opportunity to freely share what they do and do not like about reading, to express their concerns and misunderstandings, and to
support each other through the reading process. In doing so, students see their peers model an interest in reading, and learn from their peers how to engage with a text, thus promoting engagement amongst all students.

4.1.3 Teachers recognized the value of explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies and using the gradual release model of instruction to facilitate engagement in the reading process.

Throughout the interviews it became evident that Dan and Cindy both valued teaching reading comprehension strategies as a method to help their male students engage in their reading. Dan and Cindy both expressed that they felt it was necessary for students to first understand the reading process, before becoming engaged readers. The value of teaching and modelling the use of reading comprehension strategies, such as: visualizing, making connections, and identifying main ideas, in reading programs is supported in the research of Trehearne (2005). Trehearne (2005) suggests that reading comprehension strategies function to engage students as they learn to apply the strategies during independent reading. Moreover, the use of the gradual release model in literacy programs provides a useful tool for teachers as they model the use of various reading comprehension strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Both of the teachers interviewed expressed a similar belief in the importance of teaching reading comprehension strategies to their students and the benefits it provided in engaging their male students in the reading process. Dan spoke of explicitly teaching his students how to make connections:

Making connections I guess that’s certainly a big big reading comprehension strategy that I use…they become engaged. And you can see it…you’re going to see it, you’re going to see more participation, you’re going to see that they’re more engaged in group learning. They’re going to offer more ideas, you’re going to see their hands up more…they’re going to be asking questions. They’re going to come to you to ask, they want to do more.
Dan found that when he was able to select texts that his male students could relate to, and teach them how to make meaningful connections between their own lived experiences and the story, they were able to take some enjoyment out of the reading experience. As a result, Dan could see his students taking an interest in their reading and engaging in the reading process.

Cindy shared Dan’s outlook on the importance of teaching children reading comprehension strategies, however their methodology in teaching their students differed. Whereas Dan engaged in explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies, Cindy would model the use of each reading comprehension strategy during read-alouds, as she believed it gave her students the chance to practice their reading strategies in an, “authentic manner”. Cindy shared that her literacy learning goals for the year focused on teaching reading comprehension strategies through the use of the gradual release model. Cindy felt the comprehension strategies were essential for students to learn how to read, to understand what they read, and to eventually become engaged in the reading process. Furthermore, she found that the use of the gradual release model, “allows students the opportunity to take ownership of their reading at a pace that is authentic to their learning needs”. Cindy expressed this was an important step in helping her struggling male readers become more engaged in the reading process, as the responsibility for reading, decoding, and understanding the text was slowly transferred to the students.

Throughout their interviews, it became evident that both Cindy and Dan used a number of different strategies with the goal of engaging their male students in reading. Their experiences and stories suggest that teachers should be taking the time to understand their students’ needs, to create programs that are centered around the students’ interests, to teach reading comprehension strategies and to use the gradual release model in their literacy programs to help engage their
male readers. As Cindy explains, “it is important to instruct and engage students so that they will be motivated to learn and excited at their own educational growth and development”.

4.1.4 Teachers’ perceived benefits of engaging male students in reading.

Throughout the interview process, both Dan and Cindy made reference to the perceived benefits they saw in engaging their male students in reading. When implementing his reading engagement strategies with his male students, Dan shared that he could see the students become engaged in their reading and as a result they became more involved in the classroom environment. Dan described that once his students were engaged in the reading process, they participated more in class, they were able to engage in higher order thinking and critical thinking around the texts, and they had an overall higher level of motivation to be active participants throughout his literacy blocks. Similarly, Cindy found that when she used certain strategies to engage her male students in reading, they became quite enthusiastic and experienced improvement in their overall reading skills and ability. Furthermore, Cindy indicated that one of her students who became engaged in his reading, experienced cross-curricular improvements in math and social studies, as was evident through his work and academic achievements.

The findings from the interviews with Dan and Cindy is supported by the literature which states that a student’s reading engagement can contribute to the student’s success in literacy and helps to provide the foundation for future academic achievement and success (Cooper et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Trehearne, 2005). Notably, although the literature indicated that reading engagement can have a vast and positive effect on students’ overall academic achievement, only Cindy briefly talked about the positive cross-curricular effects of her students’ reading engagement during the interviews. It is interesting to note this as the research discusses the importance of improving male students’ engagement with a text so as to
help improve their overall academic success (Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie, 2001; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie et al., 2001; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Further exploration into the cross-curricular advantages of engaged reading would be beneficial in supporting Cindy’s experience with her student’s cross-curricular success and the findings in the literature.

4.2 Teachers identified classroom-based resources as well as professional development as essential elements of their instructional practices designed to engage male students in reading.

The literature review addressed various resources that are offered to help male students’ reading comprehension and engagement levels, such as *Me Read? No Way!* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004), and *Me Read? And How!* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Dan and Cindy shared a number of resources they used in the classroom to engage their male students in reading. Below I address three categories of resources used in their classrooms: (1) the teachers recognized the inclusion of a variety of text materials in the classroom was an essential resource to engage male students in the reading process; (2) teachers used professional development as well as collaboration with colleagues as resources to inform their instruction; and (3) teachers found specialized programs and resource tools to be valuable classroom-based resources.

4.2.1 The teachers recognized the inclusion of a variety of text materials in the classroom was an essential resource to engage male students in the reading process.

When Dan and Cindy spoke of their classrooms, they both painted a picture of the vast array of books and different reading materials they have available to all of their students. In Cindy’s classroom, students have the opportunity to explore fiction, non-fiction, informational texts, graphic novels, picture books, student-authored books, and novels. Cindy found that when
she offered her male students the chance to choose from a variety of texts, they expressed, “much more enthusiasm and excitement”, about certain reading materials than others, which is why she found it was important to have a variety of text types available. Similarly, Dan’s classroom library was filled with newspapers, magazines, online reading options, pictures, fiction and non-fiction texts, comic books, cereal boxes, and animations. Again, Dan found that providing his students with a wide range of resources allowed them to find a book they could engage with. The need for teachers to have a variety of reading materials readily available to students is reflected in the work of Miller (2002). Miller (2002) found that students need to have a wide variety of resources in the classroom to give them the opportunity to explore and discover new texts and to become engaged in the reading process.

Interestingly, when referring to literacy texts, both Dan and Cindy expressed a more traditional view of what constituted a text. They both discussed the importance of including multiple forms of texts, such as picture books, comic books, and magazines, however, only Dan briefly mentioned using online reading materials in the classroom. Perhaps Cindy’s lack of financial support and technological resources in her classroom contributed to her use of more traditional reading materials in her classroom. The importance of including multiple forms of text materials, such as digital texts, as well as using technology to enhance students’ interest and engagement with a text is reflected in the work of Henry et al. (2012) as well as the Ontario Ministry of Education (2004). These articles suggest that teachers need to broaden their definition of what constitutes a text, and actively work to integrate technology into their reading programs as this can function to engage male students in the reading process (Henry et al., 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).
When teachers are beginning to create their classroom library, they should be prepared to continually add new resources, to offer a variety of reading options, and to be open to including non-traditional text types, such as comic books, online reading materials, magazines and digital and non-print texts. Often, boys at the junior grade levels are directed away from familiar narrative texts and are unable to choose what they read (Brozo, 2005; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Miller 2002; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). By restricting the variety of text options available to students in the classroom, male students can become disengaged from the overall reading process (Brozo, 2005; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Miller 2002; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Providing students with the opportunity to read any type of text can function to spark an interest and help engage them in their reading. It is therefore important to give students the opportunity to engage in reading time that is meaningful by immersing students in a variety of text options.

4.2.2 Teachers used professional development as well as collaboration with colleagues as resources to inform their instruction.

Throughout their interviews, Dan and Cindy reflected on the value of continuing their personal educational growth and how it functions to help them develop and revise their teaching strategies to better engage students in the reading process. Cindy spoke highly of her training in the Junior Literacy Intervention program and the 5th Block Reading Intervention program, and explained her belief in the importance of engaging in professional development in the area of literacy and reading intervention:

Literacy is an overarching and pervasive component that encompasses all other subject areas. Even math heavily relies on a student’s ability to comprehend and interpret questions. As such, I have devoted much of my professional learning towards understanding how to better support students’ literacy development.
Cindy’s dedication to her professional development allowed her to incorporate a range of teaching strategies into her classroom to find techniques she found to be most pertinent to improving boys’ engagement with their reading, such as having a variety of texts readily available in the classroom, modelling interest in her reading, appealing to the interests of boys, knowing the needs of her students, and using the gradual release model when teaching her students how to read.

While Cindy cited her professional development as a source for her educational growth, Dan described his collaboration with teachers as being a vital component to his growth and development as a teacher, “listening to my colleagues, partnering with them…in education we are surrounded by children, but we are also surrounded by very knowledgeable adults who bring a lot to the table”. Dan consistently met with his coworkers and they used each other’s strengths and expertise to create a reading program to better meet the needs of all of their students. Dan found this collaboration to be an essential aspect of his work with his students, as he expressed, “[…] learning is cumulative. I’m teaching grade 6 so if the grade 4s and 5s aren’t on board, I’m not going to see those great results”. Through their collaboration, Dan was able to use his prior knowledge of his students to adapt his teaching practices to better suit their reading needs, and to better engage all of his students.

One example Dan provided of the positive effects of his collaboration was from his first teaching position working in an inner city school with a group of junior elementary boys who were uninterested in reading the traditional narrative texts he used in his literacy program. Dan noticed, however, that the boys demonstrated an interest in comic books as some of them would slip a comic book in between the pages of their assigned reading books. In response to his students’ lack of engagement in his reading program, Dan worked with his colleagues to develop
a reading program based on super-hero comic books. The response he received from his students was incredible; the boys actively participated in their reading tasks, they were excited to contribute to class discussions, and they were heard discussing and reading the books outside of class time. Dan was able to engage his reluctant male students as he appealed to them on an, “interest [and] emotional level”.

The importance of teachers participating in literacy-based professional development is well documented in the literature (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), and is reflected in the positive results Dan and Cindy have experienced in engaging their male students in reading in their classrooms. This suggests that, as teachers begin their careers in education, the value of continuing their professional development and collaborating with colleagues in the area of literacy and reading development is key. Engaging in these practices will help teachers as they establish reading programs that will be inclusive and engaging for all of their students.

4.2.3 Teachers found specialized programs and resource tools to be valuable classroom-based resources.

With regards to the resources the teachers used in the classroom, they both identified different tools they found to be helpful and incorporated into their practice. Interestingly, neither of the teachers referred to the resource guides discussed in the literature review, such as Me Read? No Way! (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004), or the EQAO research guide (Klinger et al., 2009). Rather, they each spoke about different resources they found to be helpful in the classroom when engaging male students in reading.

Cindy discussed the benefits of the Junior Literacy Intervention (JLI) program, a program offered in the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB, 2015). She stated, “struggling students are often left behind as their needs in a class with 30 other students can be an
overwhelming demand on a regular classroom teacher”. Cindy went on to say that these struggling students, “greatly benefit from a short intensive intervention to re-engage their attention”. In her program, Cindy withdrew students who were struggling with their reading literacy skills, taught them reading comprehension strategies and worked to engage these students in the reading process. Through the program, Cindy had access to a wide variety of reading materials, creative and engaging reading-based activities and interactive learning opportunities. This specialized reading program gave Cindy the opportunity to work with a small group of struggling readers and allowed her to more fully understand their reading needs; and it provided her with a number of tools to use to, “re-engage their attention”, and ultimately engage them in the reading process.

Dan drew on a different set of resources and tools in his grade 6 classroom. He shared that his reading program was based off of the Ministry documents on reading instruction, and he drew on the Comprehension Attitude Strategies Interests (CASI) reading assessment tool and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) tool to inform his instruction. The CASI reading assessment tool enabled Dan to better understand the interests and attitudes of his students, and directed him in his approach to engaging his male students in reading (TDSB, 2013). The DRA tool is an assessment piece that informs teachers of students’ instructional and comprehension levels in reading (TDSB, 2013). Teachers can use the information gathered from the CASI and DRA assessments to help guide their text selections (e.g. genres, text levels and difficulties, and text types) to better appeal to boys’ interests and to encourage engagement with their texts.

Although Dan and Cindy did not refer to the resources presented in the literature review, such as the reading guides by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2004, 2009) or the EQAO research guide (Klinger et al., 1997), they each drew on different resources, and found strategies
that suited their needs and enabled them to better meet the needs of their students. Teachers have a responsibility to try various resources in their classrooms and determine which resources are appropriate to their students’ learning needs. This will help teachers more fully engage all of their male students in the reading process.

4.3 Teachers identified individual factors that supported male students’ reading engagement, such as parental involvement, as well as factors that challenge male students’ reading engagement, such as the home environment.

After completing the interviews, it became evident that the home environment, parental involvement, and parents’ interactions with their children and the teachers can all have an effect on the level of reading engagement of male students in the classroom. This finding is consistent with the literature, which has shown that the home environment can affect male students’ reading behaviours and engagement with the reading process (Brozo et al., 2007; Campbell et al., 1997). While both Dan and Cindy spoke of this phenomenon, they each focused on two different viewpoints; Cindy spoke of the relationships she had with parents and how they positively affected and supported her students’ involvement, and Dan spoke of the challenges the home environment can have on students’ level of engagement. Below I elaborate on two subthemes that emerged from this theme: (1) teachers find strong collaboration with parents and parental involvement to support higher levels of reading engagement; and (2) teachers find parental backgrounds, the home environment, and parents’ reading practices to be factors that challenge male students’ reading engagement.
4.3.1 *Teachers find strong collaboration with parents and parental involvement to support higher levels of reading engagement.*

During the interview, Cindy elaborated on how parental involvement can positively contribute to students’ reading practices. She found that when parents were involved and given the opportunity to freely communicate with the teacher, she was better able to understand the needs of the student and adapt her instruction accordingly. Cindy shared an example of a grade 5 boy who was a struggling reader and did not express any interest in the reading process. Cindy was approached by the student’s parents, as they were concerned that he would not read any books for pleasure. The parents stated their child did not appear to be engaging in the reading process, as he would complete the bare minimum amount of reading to complete his homework as quickly as possible. After discussions with the parents, Cindy better understood the student’s attitude towards reading and she was aware of ineffective strategies the parents had used in an attempt to engage the boy in reading. With this information, Cindy was able to adapt her instruction and interactions with the student as she explained:

I began to mention in class that I was reading a really amazing story and was completely enthralled with it (the book I chose was Harry Potter). The student started to ask me why I enjoyed it so much and gradually began to take an interest in what was happening in the story. I casually mentioned that I thought he might enjoy the story. I continued to model this enthusiasm and love of reading and in a couple of months, his parents informed me that he was reading the Harry Potter series for fun at home.

Cindy’s collaboration with the parents positively affected the boys’ reading practices as she was able to use their insight to inform her teaching practices and classroom strategies. As a result, Cindy was able to find a method that functioned to inspire the boy to read and to become fully engaged in the reading process.
Although the effects of parental involvement were not addressed in the literature review, it is interesting to note that parental involvement is another factor that can play a role in student engagement, as it did in Cindy’s class. Cindy’s example demonstrates the need for teachers to maintain open communication with the parents and guardians of their students. Teachers should use the parents’ and guardians’ knowledge of their children to help them better understand and attend to the needs of the students in their classrooms. By collaborating and maintaining a relationship with the parents, teachers may be able to better inform their instruction and find effective means to engage their disengaged male readers, or any disengaged reader in their classroom. Further investigation into the full extent parental involvement can have on male engagement with reading is required.

4.3.2 Teachers find parental backgrounds, the home environment and parents’ reading practices to be factors that challenge male students’ reading engagement.

In addressing the question of why he believed some male students are not engaged readers, Dan discussed the effect the parents’ background, the home environment, and the parents’ reading practices, can have on a student’s level of engagement with a text. He believed each condition could affect male students:

[…] look at the, at where they’re coming from and what’s going on at home. Are they being read to regularly? Do their parents have an interest in literacy? Uh, what’s their social and economic background of the parents? […] do the parents take regular trips to the library? Are they encouraged to read at home?

When Dan took the time to look at the experiences his students had outside of the classroom he found he was better able to understand why his male students were not engaged in his reading program. Dan found that when the parents did not model an interest in reading, the students were also unlikely to demonstrate an interest in reading. One example Dan provided was from his experience working in an inner city school. At this school, Dan explained that many of his
students were from low-income families and welfare households. Using this knowledge, Dan provided students with the opportunity to read comic books about super-heroes in his reading program. He found that in doing so, the male students were able to engage with the text, as the story provided the students with strong role models.

It is important for teachers to recognize the value of knowing their students and their home experiences. Teachers need to understand where their students come from, what their home environment is like, what their reading background is, and how reading is valued in their home, to help them better understand why their students are disengaged readers. Research has shown that a low socio-economic status or family education background can negatively affect a student’s ability to attain educational successes. However, higher levels of reading engagement can help accommodate for this as engaged readers often have a high potential to overcome obstacles to achievement (Brozo et al., 2007; Campbell et al., 1997; Guthrie et al., 2001; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). If teachers are aware of their students’ home environment and take into consideration the values parents place on reading in the household, teachers will better understand their students and their needs, and could develop more effective strategies to engage these students. By helping students develop their reading engagement, they could function to help students become instruments of their own educational growth (Guthrie et al., 2001).

4.4 Teachers encounter challenges and barriers both inside and outside of the classroom environment when promoting reading engagement amongst male students.

The final theme that appeared through the analysis process was in relation to the various barriers and challenges the teachers experienced both inside and outside of the classroom environment. In exploring the idea of barriers and challenges, it became evident that Dan and Cindy experienced different barriers and challenges outside of the classroom with respect to the
support and funding they received to better support their students in the classroom. However, they shared similar challenges inside of the classroom, with regards to boys’ reading behaviour. As such, two subthemes will be explored within this theme: (1) teachers’ varying degrees of school support and funding prove to be a challenge when engaging male students in the reading process; and (2) male students’ attitude towards reading and their classroom behaviours were significant challenges for the teachers.

4.4.1 Teachers’ varying degrees of school support and funding prove to be a challenge when engaging male students in the reading process

Working in the JLI program, Cindy found she was able to effectively work with her students to help engage them in the reading process. However, Cindy shared that a significant barrier to her helping her students engage in the reading process and to improving their reading literacy skills was the fact that there have been a number of budget cuts and as a result there is not enough funding for her JLI program. Cindy expressed the following sentiment, “The school system must be supportive of literacy intervention programs. I believe that these are critical to re-engaging students who have lost their desire to read”. Through the program and with the support of the school, Cindy was able to develop techniques and strategies to use in her classroom to help her students develop their literacy skills, while at the same time engaging all of her students, including her reluctant male readers, in the reading process. Cindy expressed the need for schools to continue to support reading intervention programs such as JLI and to not cut funding, as she believes, “literacy is an overarching and pervasive component that encompasses all other subject areas”. By cutting funding to the program, Cindy is left to face the challenges of engaging her students without the financial support of her school. She no longer has the opportunity to work with her students in small group settings, where each student receives
specialized instruction and support to improve their reading literacy and consequently their overall engagement with a text. Cindy believes that in order to better meet the needs of her students, the school needs to continue to support her JLI program, as Cindy said, “saving a dollar in the short term will most certainly cost society more in the long run”.

While both Cindy and Dan discussed the importance of school support, Cindy shared the challenges of not receiving enough financial support, whereas Dan spoke of the benefits he experienced as a result of the financial support he has received from his school. Dan believed his school provided ample support and professional development opportunities for teachers to tailor their instruction to the needs of their students, for example, the struggling and disengaged readers in Dan’s class. The value of teachers having the opportunity to continually engage in professional development is evident through the research of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2003), which suggests that teachers should continually improve and develop skills necessary for effective reading instruction. In order for this to take effect, however, all teachers need to receive enough support and funding from their school to better support and meet the needs of their students, and to engage every student in the reading process.

4.4.2 Male students’ attitude towards reading and their classroom behaviours were significant challenges for the teachers.

One challenge teachers may experience when faced with junior elementary male students who are disengaged readers, are the students’ negative attitudes toward reading and the resulting challenging classroom behaviours of these male students. Both Dan and Cindy experienced difficulties in helping their disengaged students overcome their negative attitude toward reading. They also experienced a number of challenging student behaviours that included: a lack of interest, enthusiasm, attention, or participation, an attitude of indifference or distaste for reading,
and boys challenging the purpose of reading in their lives. When boys exhibit these behaviours and attitudes, it can function to challenge the positive effects of the reading engagement strategies teachers implement. Faced with these challenges, Dan and Cindy had to adapt their teaching strategies to appeal to the boys’ interests, grab their attention, and encourage them to participate. One method Dan used to change his male students’ attitudes of indifference was engaging them in, “emotional and intellectual learning”, (such as through his comic book reading program). Dan found that once he was able to provide his students with authentic and meaningful reading opportunities he was able to help his disengaged male readers move past their negative attitudes and behaviours to connect the students to their reading. To overcome these challenges, Cindy and Dan had to confront these negative attitudes and challenging behaviours, and develop reading programs where all of their students’ interests were met. Dan and Cindy also proactively worked to change their students’ attitudes of indifference towards reading with the goal of improving their students’ engagement with reading.

The challenges that Dan and Cindy have experienced reflect the findings in the literature which demonstrate that teachers need to develop strategies to target the negative attitude toward reading some male students exhibit as they enter the junior elementary grades (Brozo, 2005; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). As new teachers enter the field, they have a responsibility therefore to be aware of these challenges when working with junior elementary male students. With a better understanding and knowledge of the behaviours and characteristics of disengaged readers, teachers may be able to more easily identify students who are struggling and who are not engaged in their reading. Teachers may then be able to use this knowledge to better adapt their teaching practices and implement strategies that will effectively engage their male students in reading.
4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the findings from the interviews conducted, and elaborated on the significance of these findings in relation to the literature review. The first two themes addressed in the chapter focused on the instructional practices of the teacher participants that reinforced the importance of teachers incorporating multiple strategies targeted towards engaging male students in the reading process, as well as the resources the teachers identified as essential to their instructional practices. During the interviews, both Dan and Cindy emphasized the importance of incorporating multiple teaching strategies, ranging from teacher-centered practices to student-centered practices with the goal of engaging male students in their reading. This finding was supported in the literature, which stressed the importance of providing junior elementary boys with multiple and varied forms of instructional strategies that foster the development of engaged reading practices (Booth, 2005; Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). A significant learning that emerged through the interviews, and was supported by the literature, was the fact that teachers need to know their students (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). This implies that teachers need to work with their students to find out their interests, their strengths and their weaknesses, to be able to select effective teaching strategies and provide every student with instruction that promotes engaged reading practices.

Furthermore, the literature identified ongoing professional learning as an essential element for teachers to improve their knowledge of literacy achievement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). This reflected a significant finding in the interviews, where both Dan and Cindy expressed the benefits of collaborating with colleagues and engaging in professional development to improve their knowledge of how best to engage male students in the reading process. This suggests that teachers need to have a wide variety of resources available in their
classrooms, and continually engage in proactive measures to improve their own knowledge of reading literacy.

The final two themes that emerged through the interviews related to the support, challenges, and barriers the teachers experienced when engaging their male students in reading. Similar to the findings in the interviews, the literature emphasized the negative attitude some male students have towards reading as well as their behaviour as a significant challenge teachers face when trying to engage boys in the reading process (Brozo, 2005). Additionally, the literature found that the home environment, as well as parental background and knowledge, could negatively affect boys’ levels of reading engagement (Brozo et al., 2007; Campbell et al., 1997).

Cindy reflected on the challenges she faced as a result of a lack of financial support from the schools; and both Dan and Cindy highlighted the challenge of engaging boys in reading when the students exhibit behaviours such as, a lack of interest, enthusiasm, attention, participation, and an overall negative attitude toward reading.

While Dan and Cindy discussed the challenges of student behaviour and attitude, as well as the potential negative effects of the home environment, Cindy also spoke of the value of collaborating and working with the parents of the disengaged students. Cindy’s experience suggests there is an incredible value in involving parents in their child’s reading practices as this can function to promote higher levels of engaged reading as it helps the teacher develop more effective instructional techniques that promote engaged reading practices amongst male junior elementary students. There is therefore a need for further research into the benefits of teacher-parent collaboration in improving male students’ reading engagement. Furthermore, the findings from this study suggest that teachers need to be cognizant of the challenging behaviours students may exhibit when promoting reading engagement in their classroom so as to be better prepared
to address these challenges in the classroom and to have different strategies prepared to engage their male students in the reading process.

Overall, there was substantial support from the literature for the views and strategies expressed in the interviews. Additionally, the findings from this research study contributed new ideas to the current literature on male students’ reading engagement, such as the potential of teacher-parent collaboration to improve male students’ reading engagement. Furthermore, this study elucidated effective strategies current teachers used in their classrooms to engage their male students in reading, and addressed the common resources and challenges these exemplary teachers faced when implementing these strategies. The findings from this research study contribute to the education community’s growing knowledge and understanding of how best to support the engagement of male junior elementary students in the reading process, and provides beginning teachers with a greater understanding of effective reading engagement strategies. To follow in chapter 5, I discuss the implications of these findings, provide recommendations for beginning teachers and highlight areas for further research.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify successful strategies a set of exemplary teachers use to engage male junior elementary students in reading, with the goal of improving the students’ reading and literacy achievements. The findings from this research study support the findings from the literature, which underscores the necessity of improving male students’ reading engagement to improve their reading and literacy achievements, through the improvement of male students’ reading engagement (Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Moreover, my research suggests that teachers who are aware of the benefits of improving male students’ engagement with reading, who demonstrate a commitment to developing effective strategies, and who use resources to engage their male students in reading, are better able to improve their male students’ levels of reading engagement in the classroom.

In this chapter I provide an overview of the key findings from the interviews and discuss the significance of the findings in relation to the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2. Through the exploration of the interviews in relation to the literature I am able to connect theory and current practice to better inform my own teaching practices as I begin my career as a teacher. I then discuss the implications of my research for the educational research community, and then focus my discussion on the implications of my research on my own professional identity and practice as a beginning teacher. Next, I articulate recommendations for teachers, schools and school boards, as well as pre-service teacher education programs, and elaborate on the importance of teachers having a wide repertoire of effective teaching practices to improve their male students’
reading engagement. I then provide suggestions for areas of future research and reflect on the key learnings from this research study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

Chapter 4 presented four overarching themes from the interviews and discussed the significance of the findings in relation to the literature. The themes related to: (1) the instructional practices of the interviewees underscored the importance of incorporating multiple teaching strategies, ranging from teacher-centered to student-centered practices, with the purpose of engaging male students in the reading process; (2) teachers identified classroom-based resources as well as professional development as essential elements of their instructional practices designed to engage male students in reading; (3) teachers identified individual factors that supported male students’ reading engagement, such as parental involvement, as well as factors that challenge male students’ reading engagement, such as the home environment; and (4) teachers encounter challenges and barriers both inside and outside of the classroom environment when promoting reading engagement amongst male students.

The first major finding from my interviews reinforced the need to provide boys with teaching strategies targeted towards improving their reading engagement (Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Therefore, the first theme in Chapter 4 addressed the instructional practices of the teacher participants and their belief in the importance of incorporating multiple and varied strategies targeted towards engaging male students in the reading process. Six key teaching strategies were identified by Dan and Cindy as effective tools to engage male students in reading, these included: appealing to boys’ interests, providing free choice in text selection, engaging boys in meaningful discussion and social interactions, teaching reading comprehension strategies and using the gradual release model to structure instruction.
While Dan and Cindy differed in the execution of these practices and the value they placed on each instructional practice, both participants shared a common belief in the absolute importance of strong literacy skills and the necessity of implementing effective teaching strategies designed to engage male students in the reading process. They shared this common belief, as they noticed a considerable lack of enthusiasm and engagement in reading, and lower levels of reading achievement amongst their male students. This finding was reflected in the literature, which found that some male students experience lower levels of reading engagement in junior elementary grades, which contributed to lower levels of reading and literacy achievement (Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). As a result, the literature stressed the need to incorporate a variety of effective teaching strategies designed to increase male students’ level of reading engagement in the classroom (Brozo 2005; Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie et al., 1998; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

A notable difference between the literature reviewed and the findings from this study is evident in the cross-curricular benefits the teachers spoke of during the interviews. Whereas the literature addressed a number of benefits of reading engagement on overall academic achievement (Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie, 2001; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie et al., 2001; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), only Cindy shared an example of a student where she saw this to be true. Further examination into the actual and perceived cross-curricular benefits of engaging male students in reading is therefore required. One significant learning that came from the examination of this theme was the fact that teachers need to know their students; they need to know their students’ likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and teachers need to use this understanding to inform their teaching practices. Using
this knowledge will help them better select teaching strategies that will effectively function to engage their male students in reading.

The second major theme and finding from the interviews related to the various resources the teachers used in their instructional practices to support the implementation of their teaching strategies to engage male students in reading. Dan and Cindy both explained that including a variety of reading materials in the classroom is a vital resource as it enables them to implement their reading engagement instructional strategies, such as free choice and appealing to student interest. During the interviews, Dan shared that his collaboration with his colleagues was another vital resource that enabled him to grow in his understanding of how to engage boys in the reading process; and Cindy elaborated on her dedication to continually engage in professional development to ensure she was able to provide her students with effective strategies to learn to read and become engaged readers. This finding reflects the findings in the literature which indicated that teachers should continually engage in professional learning so as to improve their knowledge of reading and literacy achievement, so as to ensure teachers are well equipped with effective resources and techniques to help students improve their reading and literacy abilities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). This demonstrates the importance of teachers having a wide variety of resources available in their classroom as well as the importance of teachers continually engaging in proactive measures to improve their own knowledge of reading literacy.

While the literature stressed the importance of using teacher resources such as Me Read? No Way! (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004), neither Dan nor Cindy spoke of the resources described in the literature review. The teachers did express however, the value of using resource tools such as the CASI, DRA, and the Junior Literacy Intervention program. This could imply that teachers are unaware of some resource tools and therefore do not use them, or in contrast,
this could imply that teachers examine different resources and use the resources that are best suited towards their own teaching style and needs of their students. As a beginning teacher, it is important to be aware of the different resources available, while also being reflective of resources and tools that are best suited towards the needs of the students in the class.

The third major theme that emerged from the interviews was in relation to the perceived effects of parental involvement and the home environment on male students’ reading behaviours and practices. Each teacher expressed different experiences in relation to this theme. Cindy spoke of the value of communicating with parents and using their personal knowledge of the child to better understand the individual needs of the student. Cindy shared that when she was able to maintain open communication with the parents of her students, she was better able to engage her students in the reading process. This provided insight into the importance of teachers maintaining open communication with parents so as to use their support and knowledge to inform their instructional practices.

This theme also addressed the affect the home environment and parental background can have on male students’ engagement with a text. Dan expressed the need to know the literacy background of his students, and to use this information to better prepare teaching strategies that would be effective in engaging his male students in the reading process. The value of understanding the effects of the home environment and parental background on student achievement and engagement is reflected in the literature which has shown that the home environment can affect male students’ reading behaviours and engagement with the reading process (Brozo et al., 2007; Campbell et al., 1997). With a better understanding of the effects of parental involvement and the home environment on students’ reading practices and engagement levels, teachers will better understand how to support and foster the development of engaged
reading practices in the classroom, and will help their students transfer these skills to all their reading practices.

The final key finding that emerged from the interviews relates to the challenges and barriers teachers encounter both inside and outside of the classroom when promoting reading engagement amongst their male students. The main challenges discussed in the interviews included a lack of financial support from schools, and student attitudes and behaviours, such as: a lack of interest, enthusiasm, attention, participation, and an overall negative attitude toward reading. While the literature addressed some challenges teachers may encounter when fostering the development of engaged reading practices amongst male junior elementary students (e.g. Brozo, 2005; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008), Dan and Cindy focused on the different strategies they have used to overcome these challenges. During the interviews, it was evident that Dan and Cindy experienced different challenges, and neither one had a prescribed solution to surmount these challenges. This strongly suggests that teachers need to be equipped with their own strategies on how to deal with the individual challenges they encounter. It is essential that teachers are cognizant of the challenges they may encounter when promoting reading engagement in their classroom and are prepared to address these challenges in the classroom and to have different strategies ready to engage their male students in the reading process.

5.2 Implications

The intent of this research project was to better inform beginning teachers’ knowledge and understanding of how to support male students’ reading achievement. The literature and the teacher participants in my study clearly demonstrated the need to improve male students reading engagement, they provided insight into effective teaching practices that promote reading
engagement, and provided guidance into the challenges and resources available to improve male students’ reading engagement. After analysing the literature and the data from my interviews, it became evident that there were both broad implications of my research on the educational research community, as well as implications on my own professional identity and practice.

5.2.1 Broad Implications: The Educational Research Community

Literacy and reading achievement are dynamic areas of study that have been the focus of a number of studies, and will continue to be an integral component in education-based research (Cooper et al., 2014; Gambrell, 1996; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2008). Specifically, reading engagement of male junior elementary students has been an area of focus and concern as there continues to be a gap in reading achievement between male and female students, and research has shown this gap can be explained in part by a lower level of reading engagement amongst male students (Booth et al., 2008; Booth et al., 2014; Brozo et al., 2014; Cooper et al., 2014). This study highlighted effective teaching strategies and resources current teachers are using in junior elementary classrooms to engage male students in reading. In addition, the study outlined the challenges these teachers experienced when engaging male students in reading. The findings from this study have implications on the educational community, elementary schools, and pre-service teacher education.

The findings from this study can help schools and school boards as they evaluate current practices in schools that may discourage male junior elementary students from becoming deeply engaged readers. The study highlights the need to help teachers provide a learning environment that is conducive to the learning needs of all students. Therefore, there is a need to continue to support programs such as the Junior Literacy Intervention program that Cindy taught, rather than cutback funding in these areas. Reading programs, such as JLI, function to help struggling
students develop stronger reading comprehension skills, which can function to improve students’ reading engagement (Trehearne, 2005). To foster the development of engaged readers, students must be provided with learning experiences and instructional practices that are conducive to engaging their attention, such as through free choice, interest-based reading, and social interactions based on the reading material. Teachers need to be able to provide their students with the opportunity to succeed in their reading practices by providing them with the opportunity to be engaged readers.

The findings from this research study will better inform teachers’ current practices in the broader educational community. As is evident through the work of Brozo et al. (2014) and the OECD (2014), male students’ lack of reading engagement and consequent lower levels of reading achievement are an ongoing problem in the education community. The literature and the findings from this study suggest that teachers need to continually update, adapt and improve their literacy and reading instruction. As such, teachers need to be aware of the changing nature of reading instruction and research that examines teaching strategies that have been effective in improving male students’ reading engagement in the classroom. Both Dan and Cindy shared a number of effective teaching resources, strategies and challenges they encountered when engaging their male students in reading. Accordingly, the findings from the study and the strategies Dan and Cindy implemented into their daily practice may assist educators in the broader community, as well as beginning teachers, develop their own repertoire of effective teaching strategies to engage male students in reading, and provide the foundation for teachers’ continued professional growth and development in the area of reading engagement and literacy.

The interviews with Dan and Cindy suggest that there is a need for teachers to have a strong foundation of literacy-based knowledge. Both Cindy and Dan had strong literacy
backgrounds and were therefore well prepared to provide their students with effective literacy instruction, particularly in the area of reading engagement. Cindy and Dan spoke of the importance of knowing their students and knowing how to provide them with a meaningful learning experience that provides students with authentic reading opportunities. Furthermore, they each spoke of the multiple instructional strategies they have developed and implemented into their reading programs. As such, there should be an increased focus in pre-service teacher education programs on practical strategies and resources beginning teachers can use to increase reading engagement amongst their students, in addition to providing pre-service teachers with general literacy-based instruction. Establishing a stronger foundation of reading-based intervention strategies as well as literacy-based knowledge in pre-service teacher education will provide teacher candidates with the foundation they will need to be able to adapt their instruction to meet the needs of all of their students in the class and to ensure that every student becomes an engaged reader, thus promoting life long learning and academic success for every student (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

The interviews and the ideas and opinions expressed in them, have an affect on schools as well. Dan and Cindy expressed differing experiences and levels of support from the schools they taught in. Whereas Dan experienced a great deal of support and collaboration amongst the teachers, Cindy was faced with the challenge of having funding cut from her Junior Literacy Intervention program. However, both Dan and Cindy expressed the need to foster the development of a quality reading program to help students engage in the reading process and develop into strong readers. As such, it is important that schools are well equipped to provide every teacher with the proper support they need, for example through professional development, to ensure every student experiences high levels of success and achievement in their education.
5.2.2 Narrow Implications: My Professional Identity and Practice

In addition to assisting beginning teachers develop effective instructional strategies to engage male students in reading, the intent of my research was to improve my own understanding of how to engage my male students in the reading process, and the challenges I may encounter while doing so. In my own elementary education, I was quite privileged to be supported by teachers who believed in my potential to improve my reading ability, and as a beginning teacher, I wanted to be better prepared to help my struggling, disengaged readers. Through this research study, I gained a greater understanding of the importance of having a broad repertoire of teaching strategies designed to promote reading engagement amongst male, junior elementary students.

As I spoke with Cindy and Dan, and read the existing literature on reading engagement, I gained a better appreciation of the fact that there is no one right strategy or method to engage boys in reading. Rather, there is a need for teachers to be well versed with a number of different strategies and resources, and to be aware of the challenges one might face while teaching junior elementary boys to be engaged readers. For example, a significant learning that came from the interviews with both Dan and Cindy was the fact that teachers need to know their students. Cindy spoke of the success she experienced in engaging her reluctant male readers in the reading process, once she had a better understanding of what her students liked, what their strengths were, and how to target her reading instruction to meet their needs and interests. This will help to inform my own instruction as I begin teaching and ensure I base my reading instruction on student interest. As such, I will ensure I am cognizant of my students’ interests, and integrate their reading interests into my reading program, I will provide my students with ample opportunity to select their reading material from a wide variety of text materials, text types, and
text levels, I will ensure I provide my students with the opportunity to socially engage with their reading material, and I will involve parents in their child’s education. By doing so, I believe I will be better prepared to provide my male students with authentic reading opportunities that will foster the development of engaged reading practices.

Furthermore, by having a better understanding of the potential challenges teachers encounter when engaging male students in reading, I believe I will be better able to meet, and surmount these challenges. The interviews in conjunction with the literature have provided me with insight on how to make use of a variety of teaching strategies and resources, and to collaborate with other teachers to improve my own instructional practices to foster the development of authentic reading opportunities and reading engagement. Additionally, the research process has led me to understand the importance of being aware of different strategies and techniques on how to engage male students in reading, so as to be better prepared to use strategies that work for myself, as well as strategies that meet the diverse and changing needs of my students in my classroom each year.

Finally, this research project has demonstrated the importance of participating in ongoing professional learning and development, both as a teacher and as a researcher. The research process has made clear the value of using educational research to inform my instruction as a beginning teacher, and throughout my teaching career. As such, my experience as an educational researcher, will inform my practice in teaching, as I will ensure to continually participate in education-based research, and to use information gained from my practical experience, combined with my knowledge of research-based findings to provide my students with a meaningful learning experience. Furthermore, I will use my knowledge from this research study of practical teaching strategies, resources and challenges teachers experience when engaging male students
in reading, in conjunction with my continued practice in engaging in research, to critically examine and re-evaluate my instructional practices to ensure I provide my students with an authentic opportunity to meaningfully engage with a text and to develop their skills as successful readers.

5.3 Recommendations

Three key recommendations emerged from this research project. These include, mandatory reading- and literacy-based professional development, collaboration between teachers to foster the development of improved reading engagement strategies, and building a repertoire of strong teaching strategies and resources that foster reading engagement. Below I elaborate on each recommendation and then provide a breakdown of the recommendations for teachers, school boards and schools, and pre-service teacher education programs.

5.3.1 Mandatory Professional Development

First, schools should provide ongoing professional development opportunities in the area of reading engagement of male junior elementary students. Furthermore, teachers should be required to participate in these literacy and reading-based professional development opportunities. Dan and Cindy spoke of the importance of continually improving their own knowledge of reading and literacy education. This was reflected in the literature as well; teachers need to participate in professional development to continually improve their knowledge and understanding of reading engagement and literacy achievement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). The continued improvement of professional knowledge fosters a positive learning environment that encourages the growth of the teacher and the student. A teacher’s growth and commitment to improving their own understanding needs to begin in pre-service education and continue throughout their teaching career.
Specifically, teachers should be encouraged to participate in professional development sessions focused on how to assess student interest in selecting texts, how to adjust teaching strategies when male students continue to resist engaging in the reading process, and how to create a positive learning environment and teaching practices that foster the development of engaged reading practices, for example. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to partake in reading-centered professional development sessions throughout their entire teaching career, as they need to be able to adapt their strategies and approaches to engaging male students in the reading process.

Importantly, both Cindy and Dan spoke of the value of their literacy backgrounds in education, and the positive affect it has had on their ability to adapt their instruction, to accommodate the needs of their disengaged readers, and to provide guidance on how best to support their students as they strive to improve their male students’ reading engagement and overall literacy success. Engaging in professional development allows teachers to be better prepared to meaningfully engage their male students in reading. Furthermore, professional development encourages teachers to be reflective and critical of their own teaching practices. Throughout the interviews, it was evident that Cindy and Dan were reflective of their practices, as each spoke to the importance of knowing how and when to adapt their instructional strategies and spoke of the challenges they faced when attempting to engage their male students in reading and how they each were able to overcome the challenges to successfully engage their male students in reading.

5.3.2 Collaboration with Teachers

Schools need to provide the opportunity for teachers to collaborate with one another, and teachers need to be open to sharing their knowledge and experience with their colleagues.
Through the interviews, it became evident that collaboration between colleagues can compensate for challenges teachers face in the classroom when promoting the reading engagement of male junior elementary students, such as a lack of funding support, and challenging student behaviours in the classroom. As Dan explained, “In education we are surrounded by children, but we are also surrounded by very knowledgeable adults who bring a lot to the table”. Dan discussed the value and the wealth of knowledge he gained from collaborating and partnering with teachers. Each instructor brings a unique perspective, knowledge and experience to the group. As such, it is important for beginning teachers to collaborate and partner with teachers as this enables beginning teachers to use the knowledge and experience of their colleagues in conjunction with their own knowledge to better support male students develop into strong and engaged readers.

Schools and school boards should therefore work to foster and support meaningful collaboration between teachers. Schools boards should provide large networking opportunities for beginning teachers so they are better able to connect with a number of educators who are able to provide a wealth of knowledge and experience around reading engagement and effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, individual schools should develop mentorship programs where teachers who have a wealth of knowledge and experience of engaging male junior elementary students in reading, are able to share their insights with beginning teachers, to better support them as they develop their own repertoire of techniques and strategies to engage reluctant male readers.

5.3.3 Building a Repertoire of Strong Teaching Strategies and Resources that Foster Reading Engagement

Beginning teachers should be well equipped with a variety of teaching strategies, resources and professional knowledge to ensure they are able to implement reading engagement
strategies that effectively engage the attention of all the boys in their classroom. The value of having a variety of strategies available was evident through the interviews with both Dan and Cindy. For example, Dan spoke of a wide range of strategies and resources he used over the course of his 30-year teaching career. Dan was always able to change and adapt his teaching strategy when a student was not responding positively to his use of another strategy. Furthermore, Cindy expressed that she was able to draw on a wide variety of teaching strategies due to her extensive background in literacy and reading. Beginning teachers often lack the same resources and strategies more experienced teachers have due to their lack of experience, therefore beginning teachers need to work to develop their own repertoire of strategies, through their education, collaboration with colleagues, professional development, or their own research into the field of reading engagement.

5.3.4 List of Recommendations

Below I address a number of recommendations specifically targeted towards teachers, schools and school boards, and pre-service teacher education programs. Each section addresses specific recommendations that will assist each stakeholder engage male junior elementary students in reading.

5.3.4.1 Recommendations for Teachers

• Provide students with free choice during independent reading time, and appreciate and value all forms of reading material (e.g. digital texts, print, newspapers, magazines, etc.).

• Create a classroom library with a wide variety of reading materials, text types, and text levels. The classroom library should include reading material that is based on the interests of the students in the classroom.
• Teachers need to know their students. Teachers should find out their students’ interests, their likes and dislikes, their strengths and weaknesses. They should then use this information to inform their instruction to create a learning experience that is conducive to the needs of all of the students and promotes reading engagement.

• Give students the opportunity to engage in purposeful conversations and discussions with their peers about their reading material. Social interactions based on texts promotes engagement in the reading process amongst male students.

• Teach reading comprehension strategies to every student. Before students can become engaged readers, they first need to be able to understand the text they are reading (Trehearne, 2005).

• Participate in ongoing professional development and learning. This will function to keep teachers’ knowledge of effective literacy and reading instruction up-to-date and relevant.

• Maintain open communication with the parents and guardians of the students in the classroom regarding students’ reading interests, at-home reading practices, and parental observations.

5.3.4.2 Recommendations for Schools and School Boards

• Schools should support teachers as they develop teaching practices that function to engage male students in reading. For example, provide financial support for developing a classroom library in each classroom.

• Schools need to provide teachers with the opportunity to engage in professional development to ensure teachers receive the proper training in literacy and reading instruction.
• School Boards must provide sufficient funding support to schools to better support teachers and students in the classroom. Funding should not be cut from programs such as the Junior Literacy Intervention Program.

5.3.4.3 Recommendations for Pre-Service Teacher Education Programs

• Increased support and instruction on practical and effective strategies focused on increasing reading engagement amongst male students, in addition to a high degree of literacy-based instruction, should be provided in every pre-service teacher education program.

• Pre-service teacher education programs should provide teacher candidates with the opportunity to engage in education-based research to help inform teacher candidates’ literacy instruction and to provide them with the opportunity to critically examine and reflect on their teaching practices.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

After completing my research project, I am left considering areas for future investigation and research into the topic of reading engagement. First, I believe it is important for future research to examine how teachers use the potential of digital literature in their classroom to better support engaged reading practices amongst their male students. Neither Dan, nor Cindy, spoke of using digital literacies in their classrooms. They both used traditional forms of texts in their classrooms, such as picture books, novels, graphic novels and informational texts. However, the work of Henry et al. (2012) indicates that technology may enhance boys’ engagement with reading. It would be interesting, therefore, to explore how the use of digital literature might affect male and female students’ reading engagement. Furthermore, an examination into whether or not the teaching strategies presented in this research study would
also be effective in engaging male students in reading digital texts would provide greater insight on how best to engage male junior elementary students in reading.

Similarly, future research should investigate how a teacher’s definition of what constitutes a text might affect the success of reading engagement strategies they use and the consequent perceived effects on male students’ engagement with a text. For example, if the teacher holds a traditional view on what constitutes a text, would their approach to improving male students’ engagement with reading differ from a teacher who had a broader definition of what constitutes a text, including print, digital and non-traditional text forms? An exploration into how a teacher’s definition of a text affects their instructional practices and the perceived benefits the teacher sees for the student would provide greater insight on how best to support, and engage all students in the classroom.

Another area for future study is in relation to strategies teachers can use to engage female students in the reading process. This study has suggested that teachers should incorporate multiple reading engagement strategies into their teaching practices to improve male junior elementary students’ reading achievements. While there is considerable research detailing the benefits of these strategies to engage male readers and improve their reading and literacy achievements, there is little research on how these strategies, or different strategies, may benefit female junior elementary students (Booth et al., 2008; Brozo et al., 2014; EQAO, 2014; Kelley & Claussen-Grace, 2009). An exploration into how female students respond to reading engagement strategies and the potential benefits of the implementation of these strategies on their literacy and reading achievements is therefore required.

Finally, this research paper suggests that reading engagement intervention should be provided for students in grades 4 to 6. The literature addressed the need to provide intervention
for boys in the junior elementary grade levels as male students in this age range tend to exhibit decreased levels of reading engagement and achievement (Booth et al., 2008; Brozo, 2005; Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). While the need to address reading engagement amongst junior elementary boys is evident, it would be interesting to explore how fostering the development of engaged reading practices at an earlier age might affect students’ reading practices at a later age. Further exploration into whether or not teachers should begin developing engaged reading practices amongst male students in primary elementary grade levels is therefore required.

5.5 Concluding Comments

My research study on engaging male junior elementary students in the reading process has provided great insight into effective teaching strategies beginning teachers can use as they enter the teaching profession. There is a need to develop effective instructional practices that foster the development of engaged reading practices amongst male junior elementary students as male students tend to exhibit lower levels of reading and literacy achievement as compared to female students (Booth et al., 2008; Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004), and this gap in achievement can be explained in part by male students’ lower levels of reading engagement in the classroom (Brozo et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Furthermore, as research has suggested, engaged readers experience higher levels of reading achievement and success in their education and in society, as literacy provides the foundation of a child’s education (Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie, 2001; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kelley & Clausen-Grace 2009; Trehearne, 2005).

There is a need for teachers to be aware of the need to help all students become engaged readers. Additionally, beginning teachers need to be cognizant of the challenges of engaging
male students in the reading process and to be prepared with a variety of strategies to engage their male readers. As such, this research study will help inform teachers’ practices, as they are better informed of effective instructional practices that foster the development of engaged reading practices, effective tools and resources current teachers use to better prepare themselves to engage male readers, and the challenges teachers encounter when establishing engaged reading practices amongst their male students. I will use the knowledge I have gained from this study to foster the development of engaged reading practices amongst my male junior elementary students, and ensure I provide all of my students with the opportunity to become engaged readers and experience high levels of success in their education.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date:

Dear __________________________,

My name is Samantha McPhee and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on strategies teachers use to engage boys in reading. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a minimum of five years experience teaching in elementary schools, with at least two years experience teaching language arts to students in grades 4, 5, or 6, and who demonstrate leadership, commitment and/or expertise in the area of boys’ reading engagement. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Samantha McPhee

Phone Number: (416) 460-5318
Email: samantha.mcphee@mail.utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty. I have read the letter provided to me by Samantha McPhee and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview. The aim of this research is to learn what strategies exemplary teachers use to engage their male students in grades 4 to 6 in reading. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. I will ask you questions focused on your beliefs and values, as well as your teaching practices. I would like to remind you of your right not to answer any question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
2. What subjects and grades have you taught? What subjects and grades do you currently teach?
3. How many years have you taught language arts to students in grades 4 to 6?
4. Can you tell me more about the school that you currently teach in? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities, etc.)
5. As you know, I am interested in learning how teachers engage boys in literacy practices, and reading specifically. Can you tell me more about how you became interested in this area? What experiences and resources have prepared you for this work? (e.g. AQ, graduate degree, self-directed learning, etc.)

Section 2: Beliefs & Values (Why)

6. While teaching students in grades 4 to 6, what difference have you noted in the level of engagement (interest) in reading between boys and girls?
   a. Why do you think there is a difference in the level of reading engagement (interest) between boys and girls in grades 4 to 6?
7. In your experience, what have you observed about the challenges boys confront with literacy engagement and reading? What do you believe are some of the causes of these barriers to engagement?
8. In your experience, has engaging boys in reading been a challenge? How common is this challenge?
9. From your perspective, are there any shared characteristics among boys who are reluctant readers?
10. How do you think the school system, generally speaking, responds to the challenge of engaging young male readers?
    a. What do you believe the school system could do better or differently?
11. What instructional practices do you believe to be most effective for engaging male students in reading and why?
Section 3: Teacher Practices (What/How)
12. Can you please tell me a little bit about your literacy program? How do you teach your language arts class? (Generally)
13. More specifically, can you tell me about your reading program/curriculum?
   a. What are the learning goals you focus on?
   b. What instructional approaches and strategies do you use to realize these goals and why?
   c. To what extent do you use free-choice, talk/social interactions, or read-alouds, guided reading and/or independent reading in your literacy program?
14. What instructional strategies and approaches do you use specifically to foster reading engagement amongst your male students?
15. Can you give me an example of how you enacted a particular strategy with a specific student?
   Probes:
   a. Who was this student? (Grade, a little bit about him)
   b. What indicators did you see that he was a reluctant reader?
   c. What range of approaches did you use to foster his reading engagement?
   d. How did he respond to these approaches? Why do you think he responded the way he did?
   e. What outcomes of learning did you observe from him? What do you attribute those outcomes to?
16. What range of resources and support materials do you use to help engage your male students in reading? (Probe: Why were these resources helpful?)

Section 4: Influencing Factors (Who)
17. What specific challenges have you encountered engaging male students in reading?
   a. How do you respond to these challenges?
   b. How might the school system, generally speaking, further support you to meet these challenges?
18. What kind of feedback/reaction have you had from your male students with regard to their reading practices?

Section 5: Next Steps (What Next)
19. What advice would you give to a beginning teacher looking to include strategies designed to engage boys in grades 4 to 6 in reading?
20. What goals do you have for yourself with regard to promoting reading engagement amongst your male students?

Thank you for your time and participation.