Manning, Victoria Nicole. *Operationalizing a reading culture at Rio Hondo Junior High*. Master of Science (Applied Anthropology), August 2015, 51 pp., 1 table, 10 figures, references, 14 titles.

A rural Rio Grande Valley school has continuously performed below the state average on the reading portion of the State Assessment of Academic Readiness. One of the concerns expressed amongst teachers and staff is the student’s lack of desire to read for pleasure or for academic purposes. This study examines the attitudes of students and staff towards reading by focusing on the school’s reading culture. A mixed methods approach consisting of interviews, participant observation, a focus group, and a survey was employed in this study. The study found that the teachers and students maintained two polarizing perceptions of their reading culture. Based on these findings the following recommendations were made: create a literature-centered curriculum, increase and vary the selection of school library books, and align teachers’ perception with the students’ perception to create a unified reading culture.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This body of work would not be completed if it were not for the unwavering support of my husband and my committee chair for guiding me through every step of this process. I would like to thank my children for their patience and understanding and my parents for being my inspiration. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Servando Hinjosa for encouraging me to pursue this program.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...........................................................................................................iii

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES........................................................................................iv

DESCRIPTION OF APPLIED THESIS PROJECT.....................................................................1

CONTEXT OF WORK.................................................................................................................8

PROJECT DESIGN..................................................................................................................16

PHASES.....................................................................................................................................18

RESULTS....................................................................................................................................25

FINDINGS....................................................................................................................................42

DISCUSSION AND PERSONAL REFLECTION.........................................................................49

REFERENCES CITED...................................................................................................................51
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1- STAAR Reading Averages.................................................................1

Figure 1- Rio Hondo Junior High Demographics................................................2
Figure 2- Focus Group Layout ........................................................................2
Figure 3- Survey Pattern, Force.......................................................................2
Figure 4- Survey Pattern, Choice .................................................................2
Figure 5- Survey Pattern, Benefit of Reading..................................................2
Figure 6- Survey Pattern, Comprehension ....................................................2
Figure 7-Survey Pattern, Frame of Reference................................................2
Figure 8- Survey Pattern, Enjoyment ............................................................2
Figure 9- Survey Pattern, Location ...............................................................2
Figure 10- Survey Pattern, Motivation ..........................................................2
DESCRIPTION OF APPLIED THESIS PROJECT

For the past four school years, Rio Hondo Junior High has experienced vacillating results for the reading portion of their state assessment. It was voiced among teachers and administrators at the campus that students do not possess the desire or stamina to read academically or for enjoyment. This perception may be linked to a lack of reading comprehension and a negative perception of reading. Rio Hondo Junior High has consistently performed below the state average in grades 6-8 of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>RHJH AVERAGE</th>
<th>STATE AVERAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As these numbers continued to tumble the campus fell under the observation of the federal government since the campus failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress as prescribed by the No Child Left Behind Act. In 2013, Rio Hondo Junior High was on the verge of entering “Corrective Action” improvement status; thus jeopardizing the campus’ future, threatening to restructure the campus leadership and English Language Arts and Reading department. Surreptitiously for the campus, the state of Texas opted out of the NCLB requirements in favor of their own accountability plan that was approved by the federal government. Under these accountability standards, RHJH met state requirements for state assessment and was no longer in danger of a campus overhaul.

¹ This is a combined average, comprised of the calculation of grades 6-8 on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness in reading.
As a reading teacher at Rio Hondo Junior High, I believed it was important to understand why the campus continued to lag behind the state average, and how was the school’s culture contributing to this. In 2012, I began my Master’s degree and I was asked by my principal to join the Campus Leadership Team. Our task was to analyze various types of school data to determine causal factors that led to school failure (during this time, the campus failed to meet No Child Left Behind’s, Adequate Yearly Progress). The team reached a conclusion and submitted their findings to the Texas Education Agency. Given my anthropological background, I did not believe that the conclusions we reached were sufficient. Our data was strictly quantitative and limited. As a teacher I observed negative attitudes and sentiments from students when given reading tasks. Given these experiences I believed a mixed methods approach could shed additional light about the reading culture at my school. Sometime after our study, I relayed my assessment of the research methods we used to my principal, Fidel Garza. I explained to him how applied anthropologists approach problems from an interdisciplinary perspective and I made the case for the usefulness of anthropology in education. I told Mr. Garza that narratives were just as vital to the research as hard numbers, and suggested that they would provide a more holistic perspective. Towards the end of the 2014 school year, I met with Mr. Garza and outlined a proposed research plan that would include student surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations. The purpose of the research was to understand the school’s “reading culture” and develop a plan to improve it. The research findings would assist Rio Hondo Junior High in supporting readers who will read for pleasurable and academic purposes.

Rio Hondo Junior High is a 6th, 7th, and 8th grade campus in Rio Hondo, Texas. The rural farming town is nearly 20 miles north of the Mexican border. The town itself hosts a population
of approximately 2400 residents. The campus is part of Rio Hondo Independent School District, which in total, houses over 2200 students from Rio Hondo and nearby rural communities. The district has one elementary (grades pre-kindergarten to 2nd), one intermediate campus (grades 3 to 5), one junior high (as stated before), and one high school (grades 9 to 12). Rio Hondo Junior High has an enrollment of 507 students, 98 percent of the student population are Hispanic and live below the poverty line. There are 31 teachers, 2 counselors and 3 administrators; of the 31 teachers, 7 belong to the English/Language Arts and Reading department.

Nine percent of the students at Rio Hondo Junior High are enrolled in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program and labeled as Migrants. Initially, students are placed in the ESL program by completing a home language survey when they first enroll with the district. If a student’s primary home language is not English, they are placed in ESL, unless a parent denies the placement. Migrant students are also identified by completing a parental employment form each year. A student, parent or guardian must cross school district boundaries in order to obtain

![RHJH Special Populations](image)}
work in agriculture or fishing on a seasonal or temporary basis, in order to be identified as Migrant. Eight percent of the population receives special education services.

Students who continue to experience difficulty in a mainstream classroom after repeated interventions can be evaluated for special education services. If a student performs below the cognitive and academic threshold, the school will determine an appropriate Individual Education Plan and begin receiving services. Six percent of students are identified as Gifted and Talented. According to the Texas Education Code, a G/T student is one who “…exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area; possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or excels in a specific academic field.” Students are nominated by teachers and undergo various tests to determine eligibility.

Physically, Rio Hondo Junior High is a one story campus that is separated into three main educational areas: the eighth grade wing, the seventh grade wing, and the sixth grade wing. Across the campus, there are artifacts promoting reading. For example, there are several American Library Association celebrity “READ” posters displayed on the walls; in addition to four bulletin boards related to reading skills or novels. The hallways also display academic vocabulary words for the subject of reading and their meaning. Next to the library, there is a section of the wall that is dedicated to the recognition of students’ progress towards Accelerated Reader points. Accelerated Reader is a computer program used by the school to track a student’s comprehension of books they read as part of multiple choice assessments. Typically, it is a ten question quiz, which mainly covers recall facts and only the books associated with the program are testable. Students are awarded points based on the number of correct answers and
the book’s reading level. The library is located in the center of the campus and is run by a paraprofessional. The English Language Arts and Reading teachers are scheduled visit the library once a week with their classes for twenty minutes. The library is also open throughout the day to all students. In addition to the current practice of accelerated reader, the campus created a 30 minute advisory/homeroom period called Encore. It is difficult to officially describe purpose behind Encore, as the teachers involved in this study were unable to give it an exact definition. One of the current practices involved with Encore is a mandatory Drop Everything and Read time every Monday. Drop Everything And Read, or D.E.A.R. is an educational initiative designed to make reading a part of a student’s regular routine. Students have the choice to read a book of their choosing, and schools typically determine the parameters of the reading sessions. The school also implemented “Friday Writers” during Encore. On these two days, students are only allowed to read or respond to a writing prompt on their respective day, the remaining days were dedicated to the completion of missing assignments. The closer the campus came to state assessment, these practices were abandoned and replaced with additional test preparation tutoring. As a whole, Encore was met with extreme hesitation and disdain from the teachers. Teachers attempted several times to share their dislike for a practice that was implemented without consult from staff, especially when suggestions for improvement were not recognized or validated.

Rio Hondo Junior High consistently runs on panic mode, fervently trying to meet the demands of state assessment. We see a campus that places a high interest on reading because of state assessment, as reading instruction is aligned to it. Various
practices applied for the sake of school improvement have come and gone and what is left is a school culture that passes the proverbial buck as they urgently attempt to try something they believe will work. Meanwhile, the campus and district is in constant transition not only in practices, but with faculty. In the past three years, RHISD has employed a new superintendent and assistant superintendent. Rio Hondo Junior High is run by a novice principal, now in their third year and five out of the seven teachers in the English Language Arts and Reading department have less than five years of teaching experience. Teachers outside of the ELAR department agree that students are not interested in reading, but do not actively participate in practices that would enhance a shared reading culture. The attitude expressed is something along the lines of “not my subject, not my problem”. This has also been seen when trying to meet the needs of the English Language Learner population, the campus is ardently trying to exit their students from the program while closely monitoring grades an intervention strategies.

There are other campuses, who have also felt a sense of urgency in regards to school improvement, apply a practice that benefitted the campus culture. A 2011 case study by Daniels and Steres (2011) found that a Southern California middle school (grades 6-8) campus created a reading culture by making reading a top priority and giving teachers and staff the resources needed to create and sustain the environment. A majority of the students were economically disadvantaged, belonged to an ethnic minority group, or were identified as English Language Learners. The authors concluded that participating in daily reading activities creates motivating learning environments.
(Daniels and Steres, 2011: 8). This study suggests that a culture change, particularly a change in the reading culture is possible in schools like Rio Hondo Junior High.
CONTEXT OF WORK

While most anthropologists do not agree on an official definition for the word “culture”, the definition offered by Bates and Plog’s (1990) will be used as a prescript for this body of work, “Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning” (p. 7). The emphasis of the word “shared” will be applied to the beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors of schools.

Educational anthropologist George Spindler discusses the theory of cultural transmission (1997), and how it affects a child’s socialization into learning. Spindler illustrates this theory by highlighting several examples of a child’s role in its respective culture. He defines the term, cultural transmission, as the ways through which society “…teach young people how to think, act, and feel appropriately” (Spindler, 1997, p. 276). When students enter institutional agencies, such as schools, they often struggle to maintain the cultural transmission they experienced outside of school; Spindler calls this discontinuity (Spindler, 1997, p. 301). Conversely, each school has its own culture. There are a large number of schools who put forth tremendous effort to explicitly create and teach campus-wide beliefs, values, and customs. Schools impart their own cultural transmission to students. The discontinuities between the social transmission that occur inside and outside of schools lead both students and schools to struggle.

Schools can mediate the discontinuities in social transmission through their learning culture. By emphasizing academic success and reading schools can create a
culture that supports all learning and reading abilities. In *Culture: The "secret sauce" of school improvement*, Bryan Goodwin (2009) highlights the importance of schools having a healthy culture for academic success. Recognizing accomplishments, adequate resources, trust and respect must be in place to have a strong school culture. A total buy-in from staff is also necessary as it is a collective effort, but it starts at the top with administration.

Most notably, among 21 responsibilities of school leaders linked to higher levels of student achievement, we found that effective principals do the following: set high concrete goals and expect students to reach those goals, develop a clear vision for what the school could be like and promote a sense of staff cooperation and cohesion, involve teachers in decision making and sharing leadership, systematically celebrate teacher’s accomplishments (Waters & Cameron, 2007). (p. 3)

The overall campus climate is significant in operationalizing a successful learning culture at any campus. As mentioned previously, one school in Southern California, guided by the principal made radical changes in their day to day practices to create a reading culture. This effort was researched in a case study by Daniels and Steres (2011) with 108 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. The researchers found that: (a) making reading a top priority, (b) modeling by and extending support from the adults in the school, and (c) creating motivating learning environments (Daniels and Steres, 2011, p. 5) encouraged reading.

When Mr. Gaffney became principal of Parkdale Middle School in 2006, his priority was to create a ‘culture of reading.’ His commitment to fostering a climate in which all members of the school were expected and encouraged to read manifested itself in a variety of ways: (a) dedicated, specified time to read during the school day; (b) student choice in what they read; and (c) school-wide support for teachers and administrators to also read during the school day and to talk about their reading with students. Each teacher maintained a classroom library. English teachers provided time to read silently every day in class during
which students were able to read books of their choice. Because the teachers felt supported, or mandated in some cases, by the school administration to promote reading in their classrooms, the act of reading took on increased importance and urgency (Daniels and Steres, 2011, 4).

One way of fostering a reading culture is by encouraging reading from various forms of text and making real world connections for students. Naomi Bates (2014), author of *Developing a campus culture of reading*, recounts how the staff at her school developed an action plan and continued to make adjustments as the year progressed. To encourage a campus culture of reading, the school utilized social media. Information about what everyone read is posted via Twitter using the hashtag #n2rdg (Bates, 2014, p. 70). The school displayed readings lists in every classroom, teachers wore t-shirts with the #n2rdg logo; consequently, the campus saw some immediate change: students began discussing books and the number of checkouts from the school library increased in addition to students reading freely across campus (Bates, 2014 p. 71).

In *Motivation: Reaching reluctant readers age 14-17*, high school teacher, Linda Moniuszko (1992) recounts how she created a classroom of motivated readers by making real world connections for her students. The author invited her FBI agent neighbor to speak to her class. Before the made his visit, the students researched the field of work and generated questions to ask. Moniuszko found that her students were eager to complete the tasks and they greatly anticipated the visit. After this successful event, she created an interest inventory for her students and continued the same process with other guest speakers. Moniuszko suggests incorporating a whole language approach and providing various materials that were of high interest/low vocabulary.
"The key to teaching reading is meaning. When given the opportunity to read about relevant subjects that they value, students will choose to read. Their ability will develop, enhancing self-esteem and their desire to engage in reading as an independent, lifelong activity" (Moniuszko, 1992, p. 34). This article makes the case for providing material that is tangible and interesting to young readers.

Reader interest must also be present and accounted for in order to encourage a culture of reading. Educational researcher Susan Neuman (1980) sought out to answer “why children read?” and how it develops as they progress through their educational years. Neuman sampled 313 students from grades 3 to 9 in a rural New England school district. The students were asked to write an essay answering the question, “Why I like to read”. Neuman found six clusters of reasons through the study: relief from boredom, instrumental to learning, escape, cognitive stimulation, convenience of consumption, and enjoyment. Of the six clusters, enjoyment had the highest percentage and cognitive stimulation ranked last, among all students (Neuman 1980).

Another teacher-researcher intended to find out why her students did not enjoy reading and displayed negative attitudes about the task. Karen Gutchewesky (2001) created an open response survey about reading attitudes. She found that 54 percent of her students hated reading, 24 percent found it to be too hard, and the rest of her sample never found anything worth reading to begin with (Gutchewsky 2001). The author implemented changes by creating a “reader’s choice workshop” In this workshop students picked their own book within Gutchewsky’s parameters and were responsible for keeping a reaction journal and participating regularly in “book talks.”
assignment was later recreated for extra credit during the second semester and lastly she implemented silent reading. During this time students were allowed to read anything as long as it wasn’t class work from another class for twenty minutes. At the end of the year, Gutchewsky conducted another survey. The results changed significantly, 70 percent of her students reported that they enjoyed reading while 26 percent hate to read.

Motivation is important to understanding reader interest, a student must first possess the desire to read. Cambria and Guthrie discuss the “will” or motivation behind reading. The authors believe there are three major components that drive motivation: interest, confidence, and dedication. Interest is described as intrinsic motivation, which leads to long term achievement of the reader. Confidence is having the ability to believe that reading tasks and comprehension can be achieved over and over again. Dedication is the belief and understanding that reading is important, it is classified into three domains: showing persistence with the subject, recognizing the value of reading, and making equitable time for reading. The authors offer various motivational practices for elementary and middle school such as: allowing for choice, relevant texts, successful interactions, strong rapport, and collaborative opportunities (Cambria and Guthrie 2010).

Given the importance of a reading culture in students’ interests and abilities in reading this research sought to understand Rio Hondo Junior High’s reading culture through the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators.
Direct classroom instruction greatly impacts a student’s reading ability and interest in reading. Many schools continuously teach reading skills in isolation rather than making reading a naturally occurring holistic act, meaning teachers employ various comprehension strategies and skills at the same time. To illustrate isolation, an instructional lesson may focus on solely on the skill of main idea. This lesson is executed by reading small segments of texts that are written specifically for the purpose of identifying the main idea of the paragraph or passage. Reggie Routman (1991) believes that teaching skills in isolation results in the loss of a contextual meaning. Unfortunately, this is the manner of instruction that is typically advocated to meet the structure and demands of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The reading STAAR test encompasses specific reading skills such as: summarizing, author’s point of view, plot, inferential skills, main idea, characterization, vocabulary development, cause and effect, etc. These skills are tested against various genres of literature: fiction, drama, poetry, literary nonfiction, informational text, and persuasive text. School districts across the state spend thousands of dollars each year purchasing practice workbooks from vendors that contain content that mirrors the design of the STAAR reading test. Typically, these resources are the instructional mainstays in the classroom.

In contrast to the STAAR’s emphasis on skills Routman (1991) recommends teaching strategies rather than skills as it is more purposeful, constructive, and interactive. This student-centered strategy for teaching reading allows a student to apply a skill when applicable. (Routman 1991) It is possible to develop both strategy and
skill, especially through guided reading. (1991: 142) A teacher works closely with the class engaging in pre-reading and post reading. The teacher can also implement cloze (the practice of deleting words in text to allow the student to identify the missing component) exercises to develop fluency in addition to the pull-out model for intervention. This model allows for an intervention teacher to work closely with a small group of students who require intervention; but instead of taking them out of the classroom, the teacher goes to them. The intervention teacher and the regular classroom teacher work together to meet the needs of the students. They continue to work on core classroom books and content, participate in guided reading, close reading, and writing responses. This approach is a departure from the “drill and kill” culture of many schools.

In addition to skills and strategies another important element of reading comprehension is vocabulary knowledge and development. According to Nelson and Stage (2007), teaching multiple meaning words enhances overall reading comprehension. The authors conducted a research study that involved a random sample of 238 3rd graders and 149 5th graders. The participants were given a pre and posttest and the researchers observed several classroom lessons. The teachers were also given a questionnaire that rated the classroom activities and effectiveness of instruction. Some classes were given explicit multiple meaning vocabulary instruction, and others were not. The teachers were allowed to pick their vocabulary words from a frequently used words list. In the explicit instruction, teachers provided the definition, facilitated a related activity with the etymology of the word, created a word meaning
map, checked for understanding, and read a short story that included the word or words. The study found that students who were ranked in the lower group benefitted the most from multiple meaning vocabulary instruction. The students who were not given explicit instruction, did not fare as well. The teachers believed that they presented meaningful and impactful instruction. Overall, third grade students made more gains than the fifth grade students. (Nelson and Stage 2007)

Judy Ganz (2008) asserts that they key to determining the meaning of words and developing a strong reading fluency is through direct instruction and the practice of word decoding. Word decoding is the process through which a student/teacher take a word and break it up into its word parts (prefixes, suffixes, roots). Ganz suggests focusing on one to two words per week in ten minute intervals. This practice allows students to apply their skill of word decoding into other academic contents. Although some content area teachers may not consider themselves reading teachers, the use of morphological analysis of words can help them connect Latin and Greek roots to critical vocabulary in their respective fields, “Think of the enormous advantage we can give students when they learn that one root can help them unlock the meaning of 5, 10, 20, or more English words!” (2008: 140) Ganz is a strong advocate of this method instruction and supports its inclusion as part of a comprehensive reading curriculum involving novel study, guided and independent reading, teacher modeling, and explicit instruction. The practices suggested by Ganz, Nelson, and Stage can be seamless applied to instructional strategies for English Language Learners.
Ongoing reading and comprehension are also important elements of a student’s ability and interest in reading. Lev Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning and development are related. He suggested that “Learning is more than the acquisition of the ability to think; it is the acquisition of many specialized abilities for thinking about a variety of things.” (1978: 83) Vygotsky developed a theory called the Zone of Proximal Development which is able to address what is happening with a child’s development and what will happen in the future. Vygotsky believes that developmental processes do not coincide with learning processes, as it lags behind learning. Learning and development are never accomplished in equal measure, “Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them.” (1978: 88) The Zone of Proximal Development validates a student’s potential. We understand the impact that attention, play, and experiences have on a child from birth to preschool. If a child has accomplished the aforementioned qualities before entering school, surely their Zone of Proximal Development is high. Conversely, a child without these qualities also has the opportunity to grow and catch up according to Vygotsky’s theory. In regards to reading comprehension, it is possible to close learning gaps. Vygotsky’s social view of human learning suggests the importance of culture when addressing a students’ ability and interest in reading.
PROJECT DESIGN

This research focused on a set of research questions relevant to student perceptions, teacher/administrator perceptions, and teacher/administrator practices as related to a reading culture at Rio Hondo Junior High School. The questions related to student perceptions included:

- What do students believe they will “get out of” reading?
  - How and why it is important to read?
  - Do students correlate reading achievement with reader interest?

- What is the overall perception of reading for future success?

- What would encourage a student to be more interested in reading?

The questions related to teacher/administrator perceptions and teaching practices included:

- What do teachers believe students will “get out of” reading?
  - How and why it is important to read?
  - Do teachers correlate reading achievement with reader interest?

- What is the overall perception of reading for future success?
  - How can teachers assist students to help them understand why a strategy is useful when reading? How should the strategy be used?
Why is teacher demonstration, modeling, and follow-up independent practice critical factors for success with regards to student reading comprehension?

- What do teachers think would encourage a student to be more interested in reading?

Ethnography was the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, a focus group, and participant observation. Data collection proceeded through a series of research phases:

Phase One- Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection (November 2014- February 2015)

Survey

A 20 question survey was distributed to a sample of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. I recruited three teachers in the English, Language Arts, and Reading department to administer the surveys in their classes, I also administered the survey to my 8th grade students and my 7th grade students (not all students were present at the time of the survey). Before the survey was administered, I asked each teacher what type of classes they had (advanced or Pre-Advanced Placement) and how many were in each class. Based on the numbers the teachers provided and the sample size I was looking for, (approximately 300) I determined which class periods would be given the survey. All questions, which were related to student reading experiences, were formatted on a Likert Scale. The responses ranged from: strongly disagree, disagree,
agree, and strongly agree. If a student did not complete half of the survey, their responses were invalidated. In total, 282 surveys valid surveys were collected with 103 6th graders, 85 7th graders, and 98 8th graders participating.

Reading Experiences Survey

Please circle the response you agree most with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I read because it is fun.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I read because the teachers make me.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I only read at school.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I will read books for enjoyment at home.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I only read books from the library</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reading is going to help me in the future.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reading is going to help me with my other classes.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reading should only take place in reading classes.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I get nothing out of reading.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Reading is boring.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I read because I am bored</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other kids like to read.</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Teachers force us to read.

14. Teachers encourage us to read whatever types of books we want.

15. The library has interesting books to read.

16. I have enough time to read at school.

17. I enjoy reading as a class.

18. I understand most of what I read.

19. I do not understand things that I read.

20. I usually give up when the text is too difficult to understand.

**FIGURE 2. Reading Experiences Survey**

Focus Group

Next, a focus group was conducted with five members of the English, Language Arts, and Reading department. The focus group met one time for approximately 30 minutes and I acted as the moderator. We met in the school library and were instructed to sit at the same table. I informed the focus group that they would each be given a code and this would also determine their speaking order. The teacher immediately to my left was T1 and the code names continued to be named in clockwise order after T1. The group was asked ten questions, and they were each given the opportunity to
answer or pass on the question. Their responses were audio recorded and later transcribed for coding purposes.

Focus Group Questions for RHJH Staff

- Why do students at Rio Hondo Junior High read?
- What does reading mean to the student?
- Do students read for enjoyment?
- Why do students like, dislike or feel indifferent towards reading?
- How much time do students commit to reading?
- What do students believe they will “get out of” reading?
- What are the attitudes of parents in regards to reading?
- What is the overall perception of reading for future success?
- What would encourage a student to be more interested in reading?
- What types of text do students enjoy reading most?

**FIGURE 3. Focus Group Questions**

**FIGURE 4. Focus Group Layout**
Semi Structured Interviews

Concurrently, 10 students from each grade were chosen at random from the survey sample to participate in a semi-structured interview. In total, nine students participated: three from 6th grade, four from 7th grade, and two from 8th grade. All students were interviewed in the library book room at a scheduled time, they were notified in writing of the date in time of their interview.

Student one-on-one interview questions

1. Why do you read?
   - Do you feel the teachers ever force you to read?
   - Do you ever read for fun?
2. Do you think reading at school will help you become a better student in the future?
   - In what ways?
   - Will it help you in your other classes? How?
3. What kind of books/text do you like to read?
   - Where do you get them?
   - Does the library offer them?
   - Would you read more if they were accessible to you?
4. How much would you say you read a week?
   - In class/with teacher?
   - Independently? When and where do you read?
5. What do you dislike about reading?
   - Do you understand what you read?
   - Do your teachers help you make sense of it?
   - Do you ever feel like giving up? How/when?
   - Do you ever feel successful? How/when?

Three staff members outside of the English Language Arts and Reading department were also interviewed. Each respective interview was conducted in the teacher’s classroom after school, this was scheduled at the teacher’s convenience.
Staff one-on-one interview questions

1. Why do you think students read at Rio Hondo Junior High?
   - Is it forced?
   - Are students reading for fun?
2. Do you believe that students will be more successful students if they read more?
   - Howso?
3. Is there a link or connection between reading in the other contents?
   - What and how to teachers communicate?
4. In a perfect world with all of the resources available, how could students become genuine readers?
   - Do you think this can ever be attained
5. Is there enough support amongst staff to support a reading environment?
   - How/what?
   - What are some attitudes you have observed?

Finally, there were three instances of participant-observation during reading activities. One occasion took place in an 8th grade classroom during a benchmark test. I observed the class for approximately 15 minutes. In this classroom, I was asked to monitor the class while a teacher took a break from testing, I used this opportunity to take notes. Another instance was in the school library with an 8th grade class, and the last in a 7th grade classroom, both of these observations lasted about 30 minutes, and they were my own classes.

Phase Two: Data Analysis (January-February 2015)

I began the data analysis by creating a data set for the survey data in SPSS. The participants were coded by individual numbers, 1- 282. They were also identified by gender, 1 = male and 2 = female, and lastly by grade: 1 = 6th grade, 2 = 7th grade, and 3 = 8th grade. The sixth grade students were participants 1- 103, the seventh grade students were 104- 189, and the 8th grade students were 190- 282. The
remaining fields were dedicated to the actual survey questions and responses. Once all of the survey data was entered, I ran various tests in SPSS that compared students across grades and gender. While I was analyzing the data, two major patterns and minor patterns emerged. Next, I transcribed the interview data giving each participant an individual code. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into Atlas. ti, and were coded. Many of the qualitative codes used in Atlas.ti were driven by the themes and subthemes uncovered during the quantitative data analysis.

Phase Three: Presentation of Deliverables (March 2015)

After all of the qualitative and quantitative data was gathered and analyzed, I used the finalized data to prepare a written and verbal report for my client. The presentation and report operationalizes the reading culture at the campus and covers the following topics:

1) Student and Staff Perceptions
2) Data
3) Recommendations
4) Sample Thematic Unit for Literature
RESULTS and FINDINGS

Survey

A survey was distributed to a sample of 282 students at Rio Hondo Junior High. Of the sample, 140 were male and 142 were female. Amongst the grades, there were 103 6th graders, 86 7th graders and 93 8th graders surveyed. There were twenty survey questions asked with four possible answer choices on a Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. All of the data was entered into the statistics software, SPSS for analysis. Initially, a frequency was run in SPSS to compile response percentages for each question. The percentages were analyzed and most responses were grouped together into either disagree/strongly disagree or agree/strongly agree based on the percentage rates. In some cases, the researcher isolated a single scale response depending on its frequency. The most significant percentages were chosen to represent a composite response of the sample. The survey data responses were organized into two major patterns: perception versus action.

Perception involves the students’ cognizance of their reading experiences at Rio Hondo Junior High, whereas Action is the activity of reading. Within each major pattern, minor patterns emerged. Perception further spread into five patterns: comprehension, choice, frame of reference, force, and benefit. Action was broken up into enjoyment, location, and motivation. In order to ensure reliability, a chi square test was run on every survey question against gender using crosstabs to determine statistical significance.
**Perception**

The first pattern that emerged from perception is Force, it relates to the statements: *Teachers force us to read* and *I read because the teachers make me*. Both emphasize the teacher as the primary catalyst behind the students’ reading experience. Although the wording of the questions are similar, the students’ responses differ. More than half of the students surveyed do not believe that teachers force them to read, however, 58% percent either agree or strongly agree that they read because the teachers make them. *Teachers force us to read* has a p value of .286 and *I read because the teachers make me* has a p value of .097, both are greater than .05, indicating there is no statistical significance for this group. Perhaps the semantics of the question swayed their response and students are more inclined to agree with wording that appears less severe such as make rather than force.

![Force](image)

**Figure 4. Survey Pattern, Force**
Next, the pattern of *Choice* was explored. This comprises of the actual selection of text that is either encouraged by teachers or offered at the school library. The data illustrates that students are not limited with respect to choosing various books to read. Most students, eighty percent, agree or strongly agree that their teachers encourage them to read books of their choice. As a whole, sixty percent of students agree or strongly agree that the library has interesting books to read, and forty three percent of students read books from places in addition to the selection at the school library. The questions in this pattern were not statistically significant as *Teachers encourage us to read whatever types of books we want* had a p value of .355, which is greater than .05 and *The library has interesting things to read* had a higher p value of .637.

![Choice Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 5. Survey Pattern, Choice**

Moving on to *Benefit of Reading*, which looks at how students perceive reading as a beneficial component to their success in the present and future. Nearly the entire sample, eighty eight percent believe that reading will help them in the future. On the
other hand, there is a slightly lower response for *Reading is going to help me with my other classes* (83% agree/strongly agree). Although there is a difference of 5 percent, the results are telling. The implications will be discussed in the next section of the thesis. As for the Chi-square test, *Reading is going to help me with my other classes* had a p value of .042 which is statistically significant, and *Reading is going to help me in the future* had a p value of .534, which has no statistical significance.

![Benefit of Reading Agree/Strongly Agree](image)

**FIGURE 6.** *Survey Pattern, Benefit of Reading*
Comprehension encompasses the students’ awareness of reading tasks and how they respond to various levels of reading difficulty. This data suggests that most students feel confident and successful that they have a firm understanding of the text. The lowest response was for the statement I usually give up when the text is too difficult to understand, where sixty-nine percent either disagree or strongly disagree. This question had a p value of .686, which is not statistically significant. I understand most of what I read was also insignificant with a .952 p value. On the other hand, I do not understand the things I read had a p value of .034, which bears statistical significance.

![Comprehension Chart](image)

**FIGURE 7. Survey Pattern, Comprehension**

The last minor pattern in Perception is Frame of Reference, this group of questions relate to students’ ideas about the act of reading and their reading experiences. More than half of the students surveyed do not believe that reading is
boring (56% either disagree or strongly disagree). The question had a significance level of .082, which is not significant. When asked if reading should only take place in reading classes, sixty-five percent disagree or strongly disagree with the question, with a p value of .149 bearing no statistical significance. Lastly, an overwhelming majority of students, seventy-eight percent, either disagree or strongly disagree that they get nothing out of reading. The p value for this question was .707, not statistically significant. The data shows that students have a relatively positive frame of reference in regards to their reading experiences.

![Frame of Reference](image)

**FIGURE 8. Survey Pattern, Frame of Reference**

Overall, the patterns for *Perception* indicate that students have positive reading experiences at Rio Hondo Junior High. They feel that they are adept readers, who are given opportunities to choose texts they like and have sources to choose from. Students also recognize the value and benefit that reading affords them.
Action

The first minor pattern related to *Action* is *Enjoyment*, which is related to the students’ appreciation of their reading experiences. Less than half of the students (44%) *agree* that they read because it is fun. This question had a p value of .562, which was not statistically significant. The responses for *I will read books for enjoyment at home* varied, thirty-seven percent agreed and twenty-eight percent disagreed. The question’s p value was .207, making it statistically insignificant. Conversely, more than half of the sample either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they enjoyed reading as a class. *I enjoy reading as a class* had a p value of .866, the question was not statistically significant. Perhaps students enjoy the act of reading more as a class because reading is shared and the responsibility for fluency and comprehension is not shouldered upon one person.

![Enjoyment Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 9. Survey Pattern, Enjoyment**

*Location* concerns itself with where and when the act of reading takes place.

Fifty five percent of students surveyed either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the
question *I only read at school*, indicating they are reading outside of the school day. The p value for this question was .047, making it statistically significant. More than half of the students (57%) believe they have enough time to read at school. This question was also statistically significant, with a p value of .034.

![Figure 10. Survey Pattern, Location](image)

The last minor pattern is *Motivation*, which covers the question *I read because I am bored*. The responses illustrate that students are evenly split as they range from *disagree/strongly disagree* to *agree/strongly agree*. This question was not statistically significant, it had a p value of .889.
The responses for *Action* were not as consistent with the responses in the *Perception* pattern. Less than half of students read because they believe it is fun, yet more than half enjoy reading as a class. For the most part students believe they have enough time to read at school, however, they will still read after the school day is over. Lastly, there was not a significant variation of responses when asked about motivation. This data demonstrates that students may be more inclined to agree with the idea of reading rather than the act of reading.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The interview findings show that students at Rio Hondo Junior High read for various reasons. Many students shared that they read because they believe reading is beneficial to them as it assists them to be successful in other academic contents. Students trust they will understand various academic tasks because they apply reading skills, specifically decoding words and applying word knowledge.

*6-1: It will help me because I can understand some of the words that are in the books, and it will help me with like science and social studies.*
8-1: When I read math problems, key words.

The participants also shared that reading will help them become more successful in their future endeavors such as college or careers.

When asked if students believed their teachers forced them to read, almost all of the students answered, “no.” Two students shared that there are some instances where they feel forced to read.

7-3: Sometimes, like in encore. Sometimes I won’t want to read and I don’t feel like reading at that time and I don’t have a book, they’ll give me some random book that I don’t want to learn about.

Several staff participants brought up the advisory period Encore as an example where students are forced to read, specifically on Mondays during the Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.) time.

S-2: Yes sometimes, well we do this one program it’s called Encore and every Monday I think it is, we have to read for 15-20 minutes.

S-3: I don’t even do DEAR time.

Some students shared they read because they experience some sort of reward or satisfaction. This can be achieved by reaching the end of a novel, achieving a high grade, or sustaining comprehension. Students take pleasure in reading and enjoy reading numerous genres.

7-2: I read because some of the books are interesting, there’s mystery, funny and, sometimes romantic, I guess.

7-4: If it inspires me I feel like wow it’s such a great story, I don’t know.

6-2: In like that I read the book like by myself with giving up and help...yeah.
Although most students believed that word comprehension was crucial to their success as readers, students also believed that it can be their downfall when attempting to maintain comprehension. Some students dislike “big words” in texts and at times want to give up the reading task when they are unable to comprehend or decode certain words.

7-4: Big words.
7-2: Sometimes when I can’t really read the word.
8-1: Um, like some words when I can’t pronounce them, when they are real big.

In other cases, students dislike the reading task when the text is too long, or if they lose interest in what they are reading.

7-1: Like when I’m in the middle of the book and it doesn’t seem really interesting...I mean, I don’t really like long books with a lot of stuff

Types of texts and books are also very important to the participants. Their fiction interests range from: realistic fiction, historical fiction, murder, to mysteries. Other respondents enjoy types of non-fiction books that they can obtain knowledge from, or books relating to sports and activities.

6-1: Um, I like to read mystery stories
6-2: I like to read fiction
6-3: Like sports and stuff like that
8-1: I like to read books about sports
7-2: It depends I want to be a doctor, so it will help you read the medicines or something...
7-3: Just building things, all sorts of stuff like old monster books and stuff like that just nonfiction books just stuff that I can learn about like chemistry and all that.
7-4: Oh, I like drama.
8-2: I don’t know like back then books (Interviewer: Like historical books?) Yeah
One staff respondent believes recognizes the benefit reader interest has on student achievement.

*S-1: Yes, research says that the more they read the higher test scores there are. Building up fluency and comprehension reading for fun, reading library books, magazines, whatever genres they are going to read is directly correlated to how they are going to perform on the test at the end of the year.*

All of the students interviewed said they obtain their books from the RHJH library, and would read more if there were more selection. Aside from the library, students will access books from public libraries, personal libraries, and one student purchased books on his/her own.

Overall, the student interviews convey that students enjoy various types of books and they believe reading them will allow for knowledge to be gained. Most students interviewed do not believe that teachers force or make them read, however, the compulsory reading time Drop Everything And Read logged a similar complaint between students and staff. While the students shared they comprehend most of what they read, unclear or ambiguous words appear to be their downfall. When a student does not understand a particular word, this can lead to frustration, loss of interest, and an overall lack of comprehension.

**Focus Group**

The participants recognized that they teach numerous types of readers who have entered their classrooms with different reading experiences. While most students believed that they were not forced to read, the teachers in the focus group believed that reading has become a forceful act. Many teachers expressed a concern that
students may be driven to succeed to meet an extrinsic goal rather than an intrinsic goal such as accumulating Accelerated Reader points. These points are awarded to a student after they have completed an assessment on the Accelerated Reader site. The points are determined by the length and complexity of the book, and the number of questions answered correctly.

T3: Students in Rio Hondo have to read, it’s a necessity, they have to read.
T4: And they have to read because we make them, it’s kind of why they read.
T5: They have to read because we make them.

Although the teachers can distinguish a student’s reading ability, the focus group believed that there are shared familial experiences that are either hindering or helping their desire to read for enjoyment. For example, teachers believe that parents are not involved in helping their child read because their child already knows how to read.

T2: And they still want them to do it so now to them the parent attitude is it’s become an independent activity. You need to sit there by yourself and read and you can’t get up. So a lot of parents are turning reading into a punishment into something a negative reinforcement or whatever.

T5: The attitude of the parents at this age, it’s since they come into extra-curricular activities. They kind of get away from the reading with the kids because the kids are, they have other stuff to do so they don’t have as much time to do as when they were younger. It kind of tends to be the kids have to take accountability for themselves. So the parent pretty much is out of it at this age group.

Conversely teachers admit that there are some parents who are supportive of their child’s reading experience even if they are not active readers themselves.

T1: Well that’s where a lot of our students are getting their dislike for reading is from parents. Parents admit they don’t read they don’t like reading or they struggled with reading and some parents are really good with um reading to their kids, making sure their kids are reading on a daily basis. They might make a day out of just going to the library or bookstore and everyone gets a book. That’s the positive side, negative is
never read, just never seeing purpose for reading. Or maybe only read because it’s the newspaper.

T4: For the most part most of the parents that I’ve come into contact with and I’ve talked to have been really supportive even if they don’t do it themselves. Once I’ve talked to them they’re like, ‘Oh ok, I need to find something for him or her to read.’ I tell them I don’t care what it is, whatever they want to read. I want them to read and so for the most part even if the parents don’t do it themselves or are active participants they still want the kids to do it. They still at the very least they still see the value in it they see like it’s even if they don’t feel like it’s something important for them to do they still see it’s something their kids need to do.

The student survey and interview data indicated that students overwhelmingly agree that reading is going to help them be successful in their current classes and in the future. In contrast, teachers who participated in the focus do not agree with the student perception. The teachers are concerned that students are not taking their reading tasks seriously and recognizing the importance of reading experiences.

T-2: From what I’ve seen from 6th graders this year is a lot of the kids are doing, have that outlook on reading they’re looking at reading as ‘I need to do this now because somebody told me I have to do this now.’ I’m not sure there’s much um thought about the future to an average 6th grader unless somebody explicitly says you know read this now because later on in life unless it’s a book that has a lesson learned and then they apply it to their life.

T3: They don’t think it’s going to help them they don’t see the end goal in mind being that reading, you use it. As you grow older you use it for everything it’s not dependent on what career you want to do. Though you know some of them might not pursue the whole school thing which is fine, um actually that is why some of them have that mindset that you don’t need to read so they don’t have an end in mind as far reading where reading is going to take them.

T4: I think they don’t think about their future too much I mean you know they think oh you know like once I get into high school I can kind of shape up a little and so I don’t think it’s a big concern. Somewhere in the back of their minds they get ‘I need to know how to do this so that you know I can do anything that I want to do in my life’ but I don’t think it’s a huge concern to them because they’re like 15 or 16 wait no that’s too old, their 12 and 13.
This disconnect is a prime example of the distinction between action and perception. The students perceive that reading is beneficial, yet their actions in the classroom, as perceived by teachers, suggest the contrary.

Students and teachers both recognize that students have the latitude to choose books and texts of their choice. According to teachers, students are interested in various genres and book series.

*T1:* I hear that they like um scary, they like I think because of what's on TV we have certain series, HBO series and they like the gore they like um excitement, action um also they like famous people, celebrities and finding out the new modern, what’s going on, maybe even magazines.

*T2:* Every kid is different but um most kids as far as 6th graders, they really like those short chapter books you know where the chapter is about 3-6 pages long and every chapter has an action and has a point. When the book is meaningless to them they’ve quickly tossed it aside.

*T5:* The new novels that some of them like all those new series. I think there’s a question on what can encourage kids to read more I think if we got brought down some authors to give some assemblies or presentations to expose them to new things I think that would work.

One issue that students and teachers both agree on is the limited and outdated selection the library offers. Teachers and students believe if there is a varied and current selection, more students would be reading books from the library.

**Participant Observation**

In one instance of participant observation, the class was spending a part of the class period in the library. The students were given time to find and check out books, test for A.R. and read silently. If a student did not bring their library book, they could borrow one to read or read a magazine (from the magazine rack). Generally students
were talkative while they were searching for books, or students were talking at their table if they already had a book. Conversation persisted for about five minutes until the teacher gave students several warnings that it was time to get quiet and start reading. The teacher reminded students that they needed to respect their classmates and their right to read without distraction. Most students were actively reading independently. Some students were not actively reading and merely flipping through pages. Three students sat together and looked over a book together. They pointed things out to each other and shared smiles. When the class period was nearing an end the teacher asked the students to put their books away and get ready to transition to their next class period.

This scenario illustrates how reading for pleasure can be treated as a compulsory task. Although the students were not explicitly told they must read, they were asked to participate in an environment that promoted reading.

In another occurrence, students were reading in a classroom after their benchmark test. The benchmark required the students to take a previous version of the STAAR test as a mock test. Students had four hours to complete the test. The observation began approximately three hours after the test began. In a class of approximately 20 students, seven students had their head down, five were actively reading, three students were sitting at their desk with their book closed, three students had their book open but they were not reading, one student had no book at all, and one student was still testing. Students were monitored, and they were not given any reminders to read or remain on task.
In this instance, reading was the only post-test activity the students could participate in. It is possible that many of the students were not interested in reading because they had completed a lengthy and difficult assessment, which is why nearly half of the class had their head down or chose not to read. When students obligated to read post-test, this could be seen as a punishment rather than a reward, which is why many students disregarded the direction.
FINDINGS/DESCRIPTIONS OF DELIVERABLES

The findings and description of deliverables will be discussed by addressing each research question from the student and staff perceptions. In regards to the operationalization of a reading culture at Rio Hondo Junior High, it is clear that an operating culture does not exist. Teachers and students are entering through two completely different doors of perception, demonstrating that the campus lacks shared beliefs and practices. State assessment scores and teacher attitudes maintain a similar correlation, perhaps this is why teachers believe that students are uninterested in reading and unsuccessful with reading tasks. On the other hand, the resilient positivity of the students should be further looked at by teachers.

Student Perceptions:

- What do students believe they will “get out of” reading?
  - How and why it is important to read?
  - Do students correlate reading achievement with reader interest?

Students believe they will gain some sort of academic preparation for their future by reading and this preparation takes place in all of their academic courses as the survey data demonstrates. Students also perceive that it is important to read because it is a vehicle for gaining knowledge.

According to student responses, there is evidence indicating students correlate reading achievement with reader interest. There may be a specific book the student found interesting, yet had a difficult time getting through or comprehending it. If a
student completes the book, they feel successful that they accomplished a difficult task. Several students shared that they read particular texts based on their interests to become more adept learners; which will either serve them in the present or for their future endeavors.

- What is the overall perception of reading for future success?

Students believe that reading will help them in the future because they will learn words that will help them with their future professions. They also believe that reading will assist them become more fluent readers and give them the ability to understand various tasks. As mentioned in the survey data, students will gain more knowledge by reading, which will aid them in their future endeavors. Clearly, the students understand the impact reading has on their lives. It is recommended that teachers of all contents should spotlight texts that highlight a variety of careers. Teachers should also create intentional and relevant examples to support students’ future goals and strengthen their confidence as readers and learners.

- What would encourage a student to be more interested in reading?

As many of the student respondents shared, they would read more if the school library added more and assorted books to the collection. A varied and current selection of books in the school library would encourage a student to be more interested in reading. Further, each teacher should have a classroom library that has text relevant to their content and texts for enjoyment. Students would also be more encouraged to read if they did not feel as if they were made to.
Teacher/Administrator perceptions with additional follow up questions related to teaching practices:

- What do teachers believe students will “get out of” reading?
  - How and why it is important to read?
  - Do teachers correlate reading achievement with reader interest?

Most of the teachers postulate that students read in order to meet some sort of extrinsic goal. The teachers believe that students recognize the value in reading, such as gaining information, but they lack the motivation to complete most reading tasks.

Teachers believe it is important to read because students can gain knowledge, they will learn a set of skills, and it will help them on their state assessments.

Some teachers conclude that the students who actively read are the ones who experience the most achievement in reading. There is not enough evidence from to find a correlation between interest and achievement. All reading teachers should administer a reader interest survey at the beginning and middle of each school year to keep track of the collective and individual interests of the students. This survey data will assist teachers when choosing individual texts and novels. In order to strengthen a campus culture, all data should be compiled and given to the school librarian to help drive future book purchases and highlight the current selection.

- What is the overall perception of reading for future success?

Teachers do not believe that students perceive reading as beneficial or necessary to their future success. The teachers remarked that students are not thinking of their future, be it an educational or personal future, and they are not partaking in meaningful
reading experiences that align them towards a future goal. Teachers believe students are unmotivated to engage in reading tasks, therefore, they are not preparing for their future. According to the data, there are few initiatives in place to create a motivated environment by the staff for example, teachers are not given adequate time to plan or meet with teachers from other contents to create interdisciplinary assignments. Based on the multiple student responses regarding unclear and ambiguous words, students need clear and efficient strategies to build upon their understanding of academic vocabulary of all contents. This can be done by allowing for dedicated, uninterrupted time to meet with content area teachers and gathering all relevant academic vocabulary strategies. Teachers need to share and compare what they do and how they do it. A professional development should be allotted for the teaching of Latin and Greek root words, affixes, prefixes, and suffixes. It is imperative that teachers have a concrete understanding of the said word parts so they may effectively teach their students how to analyze them. This campus-wide initiative will allow students to effortlessly apply this knowledge in various contents and create a motivated environment for teachers to maximize student achievement.

Teacher Practices:

- How can teachers assist students to help them understand why a strategy is useful when reading?
- How should the strategy be used?
- Why is teacher demonstration, modeling, and follow-up independent practice critical factors for success with regards to student reading comprehension?
All students interviewed agreed that their teachers help them make sense of what they read. Teachers can uphold this finding by continuing to assist students by modeling effective reading practices. As stated before, the students shared a significant need to understand words they find unclear or ambiguous. The recommended word deconstruction strategy, as presented by Ganz, should be used in direct instruction when applicable in all content areas (as suggested previously). Further, the campus needs to develop cross-content reading strategies that can be successfully applied in all classes.

This method is critical for reading comprehension students are shown correct and effective ways of gleaning various texts. Students can be successful when they add these techniques to their academic tool box.

- What do teachers think would encourage a student to be more interested in reading?

Like the students, teachers believe stocking the library with a better selection of books will encourage students to become more interested in reading. Teachers also believe that there should be an overhaul of the curriculum to make it more reader-centered, rather than test-driven.

My final recommendation based on the findings of students and teachers addresses the campus as a whole. Given there are polarizing perceptions from each party, I recommend an alignment of perception; thus allowing students and staff to
maintain and develop a shared reading culture. The staff at Rio Hondo Junior High should begin by reading the case study by Daniels and Steres.

Conclusions

Drop Everything and Read needs to be revamped, or stricken from the campus plan. The idea behind the program is to create organic reading moments, not scheduled, mandatory reading tasks. There should be dedicated funds to continuously improve the school library. Students should be encouraged to read books and magazines on their electronic devices. Many school districts in the area, specifically districts with the same demographics as Rio Hondo ISD advocate for students integrating their personal technology into the curriculum. This is incorporated with the continuous teaching of digital citizenship. Specific sentiments in the English Language Arts and Reading department need to be explored and a decisive consensus must be found.

Lastly, in order to combat potentially adverse perceptions from staff, a closer look at the curriculum of the English Language Arts and Reading department is required. The campus and teachers must look at how reading tasks are presented and determine if the experiences are forced upon students. I have created a sample thematic unit, which was present in my deliverables to the client, to allow for more meaningful reading experiences that simultaneously support a manifold of reading skills. Rio Hondo Junior High will be able to implement the recommendations by
integrating thematic units for literature to their lesson plans and by purposefully being aware of the campus’ reading culture.
Discussion and Personal Reflection

When I embarked on this process, at graduate school orientation, I decided then and there that Rio Hondo Junior High would be client. I wasn’t certain about the exact area of study, but I knew I was working at a campus that was in definite need of assistance. My principal expressed a strong desire to improve our campus. He has also shown an immense amount of support by encouraging professional growth. Working with various members of my department as facilitators was easy as well. When I needed assistance with something, such as the survey, I approached my colleagues as a researcher; and informed them I was talking to them as a graduate researcher. They were extremely helpful and supportive. The most difficulty I encountered was the recruitment of students for the one on one interviews. I personally knew every participant in the 7th and 8th grade, so I had to remove myself as teacher and become the researcher. The great thing about children is their ability to move on from things. Not one participant ever mentioned the interview afterwards. I was most surprised by the focus group with my department. I appreciated their candor, but I was really surprised by their responses. There were several responses, which I did not personally agree with, specifically about forcing students to read. I strive to make my classroom intimate and inviting and allow for various reading experiences to take place. I do not feel that I force my students to read. I remind students that there may be specific genres that they are not interested in but we must approach the reading task with an open mind and seek to gain something. Perhaps my outlook has been shaped over the last two years by the planning and writing of this thesis. Devoting an immense amount
of time to studying reading practices has greatly impacted my personal pedagogy. As I employed the instructional practices suggested by the researchers, I felt more confident and authentic as an educator.

Meeting the demands of work, home and the thesis was extremely challenging. This undertaking was always in my sentiments as I attempted to carry on with my day to day obligations. It was affirming to see how applied anthropology and education can work together to create something beneficial. There is clearly a case for employing anthropological methods in educational problems. Through this body of research, I was able to allow for experiences to reflect and compliment quantitative data, which I felt was missing from previous research completed on behalf of my client.
REFERENCES


