Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

by

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Abstract

Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2009) suggests that teacher provided supports for autonomy, competence and relatedness facilitate motivation and, in turn, students' engagement and overall well-being. The literature related to well-being, however, does not provide a clear and thorough description of the factors that connect well-being and agency. This phenomenological case study explores the factors that influence students' agency for well-being and answers the question, "How does a choice and voice teaching approach in English Language Arts impact middle years students' agency for well-being?" The study involved fifteen participants who were students taught by the researcher in Grades 7 and 8 during the 2012 - 2018 school years. Ethics approval was given to conduct individual interviews, a focus group discussion and to use students' writing pieces as data. In exploring the literature and hearing from the students it became apparent that choice and voice opportunities are seldom incorporated in the pedagogical toolkits of upper elementary and secondary teachers in the formal education system. In order for students to have power and agency they require autonomy support with a focus on collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking. Findings revealed that human agency relates to these needs for well-being, and that the *Choice and Voice* based approach described promotes self-esteem and confidence, and increases student motivation and engagement. As such, the study reveals an approach that all teachers can implement to support and enhance learners' overall agency for well-being.

Acknowledgements

This thesis began as a journey of collaboration between many people- where my colleagues and I, alongside our students, have embraced the power of choice and voice. It is to them that I owe a great deal of thanks.

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I never would have completed my work without the unbelievable support of my school division and my administrators. Thank you for pushing me towards this journey, I will never forget the day my administrator held one of my class writing magazines in his hand and said, "Jenny, this is your thesis!"

Thank you to all my colleagues at my middle school for your constant encouragement! I have collaborated with so many incredible teachers on the *Choice and Voice* approach; thank you to the TELA group for so willingly sharing your ideas and reflections on your own practice and growth as teachers and learners. As a group we never stopped pushing the boundaries of our learning.

Collaborating with my mentor Syd Korsunsky and fellow multi-age teacher Jessica Robinson over the last 7 years has opened up doors of possibilities. I have seen the value of reading and writing alongside students, the spark within so many students as we shared books,

responded and wrote about what really mattered to us. It has been an exciting and invigorating journey, one in which I have been as much the learner as my students.

It is the students who are the true inspiration for this thesis. Thank you to all the students who shared their voice and writing; you are all making a difference!

Lastly, to my family and friends who have encouraged me along the way. I owe a special thanks to my dear friend Marissa for her heroic job helping me transcribe hours of interviews and offering her writing tidbits as she helped me weave in quotes. Thank you to my roommate, Anjelica, for putting up with me this last year and for saving me in last minute formatting! To all my friends, you know who you are- for keeping me balanced with bike rides and girls' nights- thank you for keeping me sane. Most of all, to my dear family- my brother and parents for their moral support and unconditional love, thank you.

Dedication

To Syd Korsunsky, my mentor, colleague and friend.

Co-teaching with you has opened a new dimension of teaching for me. I greatly appreciate your support as the founding member of the TELA group and throughout the phases of my Master of Education study. This thesis and my professional life would not be the same without your mentoring. Thank you, Syd, for creating a community of readers, writers and thinkers of which I am part.

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Chapter One: Introduction

'Choice' is the word in our classroom, because we like to know that we have a choice in what we learn and how we learn it in a way we can actually learn from it! This has helped me and other students understand things in a way we ***can*** *understand, because sure if we went the more traditional way like everyone else is doing (given a topic to write about and how to write it), but we get to choose how we want to learn and what we want to learn! And trust me when I say it, I enjoy it!*

My teachers have taught me that this is the real world.

This is our turn to shine. ("Choice Letter," Karley McDonald, Gr.8 Student, Appendix A)

I begin this thesis with a narrative that illustrates how a typical language arts lesson unfolds in my classroom. I then explain how I came to give students more choice and voice in their learning by transitioning from a more teacher-centered pedagogy to a student-centered approach. This is described in detail in order to provide a depiction of what occurs throughout Reading/Writing Workshops and students' inquiry projects. In my experience there seems to be a disconnection regarding the implementation of the Manitoba English Language Arts curriculum and the incorporation of what the authors of this curriculum consider to be "best [teaching] practices". I identify the problems related to this disconnect that I have observed within the education system, both nationally and locally (i.e., in the classroom). This is followed by a presentation of my research question and purpose, the assumptions of the study and definitions of key terms.

A Glimpse into a Classroom Moment

It is a cloudy afternoon at the end of January 2017. The students and I have returned to our writing. Some are working on revising their holiday vignettes. Others have begun to write pieces for a news magazine for our middle school. Several of these students are writing profiles of people they interviewed. There are a couple issue pieces on the go, an advice and fashion column, a few movie and video game reviews, and a feature story about a sport team. The choices the students have made for writing a column for the news magazine seem infinite. Although it may be a gloomy winter day, the room is actually buzzing.

I use a SMART system to project a student's holiday vignette on the board. I have her permission to do a whole class conference to help her develop the "tension" in her piece. This focus on tension is one of our key exercises in writing, along with character and setting. I'm going to try a new spin on the whole class conference that my mentor, Syd Korsunsky, has revamped. Rather than project the piece and ask kids for oral feedback, with only a few students participating, I am going to have ALL the students participate. Each student is going to write their version of that particular moment of tension. I ask, "How would you write it if this was your piece?"

I sit down with a group of my students and begin to do my own re-write of her moment of tension. I share a couple thoughts with students and feel excited getting back into the writing zone. I need to do this more often! As we are all immersed in our writing, Syd walks into the room. I barely notice he is there as I'm lost in this exercise. I turn around and say "Hi, we're trying out this new whole class conference, and it's awesome!" He smiles and says, "I'm just going into Kari's room to do that exercise with her grade 6 class." He leaves and we continue writing.

I give them about 5 minutes and then ask volunteers to share what they wrote. Although only a few share out loud, at least this time they have *all* participated. The ones who may be too shy to speak in front of the class have had a chance to help another student with feedback in a way that they are comfortable. They smile at how they revamped their classmate's work, and I can feel a sense of pride in how far this group has come.

The next day, I get a text from Syd, "I just got an idea for an essay I want to write about your class, because of what I saw yesterday."

I reply, "Hopefully it was good."

He responds, "No, it wasn't good. It was great!"

How the Students and I Got Here

> *Teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability. As we try to connect ourselves and our subjects with our students, we make ourselves, as well as our subjects, vulnerable to indifference, judgment, ridicule* (Palmer, 2007, p. 17).

As I step foot into the middle school at the beginning of September 2010 I'm greeted by the principal who walks me to my classroom. I sense my nervous excitement as I take it all in. This school division serves the catchment area where I grew up, and is where I attended school. I know this community, and I feel at home here already. But feeling comfortable and knowing what I'm doing are two completely different things. Teaching middle school is a whole other ball game, and I begin to worry how I'm going to survive my days with hormonal teenagers.

I majored in early years education and spent the first three years of my career teaching in elementary schools in Thailand and Ecuador. I knew how to teach a child how to read and write but, beyond that, I didn't really feel comfortable teaching middle school. I was assigned to teach

all of the core subjects in Grade 7 and was paired with a teaching partner who helped guide me

in teaching math and science. I wasn't absolutely certain what to do in English Language Arts

(ELA), so I went with what I had done as a student in Grades 6 through 8: novel studies/chapter

questions, book reports and literature circles, where each person was assigned a book and role. I

survived my first year teaching Grade 7, but I wasn't happy. I felt that something was missing.

September of 2011 rolls around, and I'm back at my middle school teaching Grade 6. As

I prepare for the first couple days of school, I reflect on my past year. I'm not satisfied with what

I was doing in terms of instruction. The students were passively learning and struggling to have

meaningful discussions about books or to write anything that truly mattered to them. The more

involved I became, the more some nagging questions just wouldn't go away: *How much choice*

did the students have? Did they feel empowered? Did I? I hold these values, yet I'm not fully

implementing them in my classroom. I realize I am experiencing a "living contradiction," as my

beliefs are not aligning with my practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This awareness causes

me to seek out those who are teaching in the direction I want to go.

TELA (Teachers of English Language Arts). I reach out to a colleague to speak with

her about her ELA programming. She hands me her students' Reading and Writing Workshop

notebooks. As I flip through the pages I'm stunned at what I see. I read a poem that moves me to

tears about the death of a loved one and wonder how a limerick or an acrostic poem would match

the intensity of the young author's words and insight. Not only did it matter to the writer, it was

beautifully crafted. *But how was a young student able to write something this good?* I saw

reading responses where a student was making powerful connections to her own life and making

the reading come alive for herself. I wondered how my chapter questions captured the depth of

that kind of understanding and how my colleague was able to get that kind of response from her students?

Her students are responding to literature, connecting to themes and expressing their feelings so openly. Not only are they writing about what matters to them more passionately, they are representing a level of thought I didn't think possible. I recognize it wasn't just the matter of choice of topic or book, but also the craft represented in the examples I read.

"How on earth are you doing this?" I ask her.

She replies, "I've had help along the way Jenny; this didn't just happen by itself. I have a mentor, Syd Korsunsky. He's a retired teacher who works with me and also with a group of teachers. They call themselves "TELA - *Teachers of English Language Arts*."

"I want to meet him! Can I come to a meeting?" I ask, just about to jump out of my seat.

"Of course, I'll give you the information, and you should definitely join us!"

A week later I attend my first TELA meeting at the local high school. I find myself sitting amongst a group of teachers, enthusiastically talking about their students reading, writing and interest-driven inquiries. I have hundreds of questions bouncing around in my head, and I feel overwhelmed with how to begin. I think back to my own years of schooling. I rarely had the opportunity to write what mattered to me or to read what I wanted. It was always research papers and five- paragraph essays. I thought there was an exact way to teach the writing process: generate ideas, first draft, revise, edit and share. It was during this meeting that I begin to realize it's not that simple; there are many ways to get writing started.

But as I sat there, I thought: *I have no idea how to begin to teach poetry and memoir like this.* I left the meeting feeling overwhelmed, but excited at the same time. The next day I

received an email from Syd offering to come to my classroom and model how to start a Reading

and Writing Workshop. I opened up an attachment of the poetry and memoir genre studies that

he had designed. I sighed in relief. *I can't wait to get started!*

      From teacher-directed to a student-centered learning. Over the past six years,

collaborating with Syd and a group of like-minded colleagues has opened up a door of

opportunities I could never have imagined. This isn't to say it's been easy. There have definitely

been some growing pains and turbulence moving from a more teacher-directed to a student-

centered classroom.

      I knew that I had to be the kind of teacher Parker Palmer is talking about in *The Courage*

to Teach when he wrote, "When you love your work that much – and many teachers do – the

only way to get out of trouble is to go deeper in" (Palmer, 1997, p. 2). This is the journey of how

my students and I have embraced the power of choice and voice. I didn't do this on my own: the

professional community of teachers involved in TELA has helped me along the way with the

approach we have called *Choice and Voice*.

      In this thesis, the evolution of a literacy/inquiry approach that provides Middle Years

students with choice and voice in their learning will be described. There are several projects in

which students have participated. These include inquiry through literature, where students

replicate the authoring process; Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome contributions that are the

result of guided inquiries; an inquiry focused on homelessness, where students create characters

that are experiencing homelessness and share their stories; a climate change inquiry; and an

independent wonder inquiry. Throughout the process, students are engaged in critical thinking,

communication, collaboration, and creativity. These are the skills that the Partnership for 21st

Century Learning (2007) argues are needed to sustain interest in learning beyond the classroom.

The reading/writing workshop approach is fundamental to the English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum in Manitoba as language is central to all learning. "Through the English language arts learners become flexible, reflective, and critical thinkers who are able to interact with complex ideas about themselves, the world, and society" (Manitoba Education and Training, 2017, p. 5). Nancy Atwell (2015) and Linda Rief (2014), as well as numerous other teacher/authors cited in the Manitoba ELA curriculum document, have provided both theoretical and practical basis for many ideas TELA has used in implementing the *Choice and Voice* approach. For example, writing pieces must matter to the writer and have an authentic audience and purpose. Rief (2014) and Atwell (2015) advocate that teachers write alongside their students and share their own writing to develop trusting relationships. The idea that there should be freedom of choice in writing topics and book choice in reading is another important aspect of the reading-writing connection. What immediately follows is an example of what it looked like in my classroom and in real time with a particular student.

Choice and voice in my classroom: Sarah's story. "We all have a voice, and we have the power to change lives*" (*Sarah, Teen Ambassador for Dystonia Medical Research Foundation Canada (DMRFC)).

In her grade 8 year, Sarah, a student I had also taught in Grade 7, was attending school half time, as she was living with dystonia. Dystonia is a neurological movement disorder that affects the nervous system. Adaptations had been put into place while Sarah was in my Grade 7 class so that she could continue to work on her projects from home. This never stopped her from achieving her academic goals. In that year, she wrote a letter to her favourite author, composed an essay about cats and the Humane Society, authored a variety of poems about special moments, developed an interview profile of the program and membership director of The

Cerebral Palsy Association of Manitoba, and wrote an issue piece on the "Reality of

Schoolwork" and the volume of paper wasted in schools. In Grade 8 she developed her own self-

directed inquiry project ("The Path to Achievement", Appendix B) which was designed to help

her figure out how she could graduate high school on time: the average for students dealing with

similar disabilities is to graduate at age 21 rather than 17 or 18.

Not only did Sarah write using a variety of genres, but the range of issues on which she

reflected were very important in her life. Today, not only did she graduate from Grade 12 as an

honours student, she is also the teen ambassador for DMRFC. In her role as teen ambassador, she

has visited numerous schools and has had an essay she wrote about her life published in

Maclean's Magazine Online. She has acknowledged that the experiences she had in our

classroom inspired her to continue writing and sharing her voice. This is just one example of the

practice of using language as power and agency, which is one of four practices that the

curriculum uses to describe the ways that people use language in the classroom and beyond

(Manitoba Education and Training, 2017). The Manitoba ELA curriculum is clearly promoting

agency as students need "opportunities to use language that reflects their identities and enables

them to advocate for themselves, their communities, and the environment." (Manitoba Education

and Training, 2017, p. 14).

What Students and I Do in English Language Arts

In my Grade 7/8 classroom, Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop occur

simultaneously throughout the school year. I begin the year by writing a letter to my students,

telling about myself. I have learned that teachers can't expect kids to share personal stories

unless they are willing to do the same. I use this letter as a lead into a first writing piece that

highlights key moments from the summer. The students read my letter and write back to me.

My next instructional step is to have the students choose one summer moment from my original letter that they would like me to write about. Modeling my own writing for students is an essential part of my classroom: they need to see me as an authentic reader and writer, and that what I ask of them is something I do as a writer.

I quickly tell them the story and talk about the moment ("photograph") where I would begin the story. As a class we identify the setting ("neighbourhood") of that moment, and the students individually write the "neighbourhood" as they think it would appear in a book. "Write it like a writer" is what I tell them. I do the same and write along with them. This is a process I use later with whole class conferences (WCCs). I then have the students in the class write their own "neighbourhood" settings by first making sure they have found the "moment" and have their story in their head. I circulate to assist students who might need help. At the end of class I collect their work and keep a "running record" of where I see they are developing.

The next day, I share with them a sample piece from Linda Rief's (2003) book *100 Quick Writes*, "On Being Asked to Select the Most Memorable Day in My Life" (p. 51), about how we remember moments more than events. This is the first key exercise. I call it "Moment in Time." The students make a list of key moments from their pasts, and choose one to write about for a few minutes. As in all writing exercises, I model this first.

From this point on, I formally introduce the genre of "vignette": a short narrative that has a beginning – middle – ending. I also introduce the other exercises: character ("hats") and tension. In each case, I have students first try out the idea using the teacher's moment. This will provide a model for how we will be doing WCCs in the future. In Atavia's writing piece "Alone," she has created a character that we care about; her neighbourhood reveals that she is someone who seeks out quiet in our busy world (see Appendix C for Atavia's "Alone").

When I see that we're on track, I set a "completion date." This is the first and only class deadline for Writing Workshop. I begin each subsequent class with my piece of writing and look at the issues I'm having. This is where the students are invited to provide feedback. By providing feedback and listening to the feedback provided by their peers, they can begin to apply the same processes in their own writing. This is also the setting in which I might notice that some students could benefit from WCCs, and I check with them to see if they are willing to share. By the end of September, the students should be ready to go with "Choice Writing Pieces." As such, the assignment just described is the last time the students in the class are at the same place in Writers' Workshop. Thus, individual deadlines replace whole class deadlines.

Throughout the first weeks of school, I weave into each day's schedule "getting to know you"/ "generating topics" activities and other quick writes. These pre-writing activities will often lead to students' first "choice" topics for writing. There are a number of exercise activities such as "Write off the Page" and "Draft Zero" and others created by Syd Korsunsky that I introduce to support Writers' Workshop.

By the second full week of school, I start Reading Workshop. This is where I "marinate" students in poetry and great memoir read-alouds. These are the next two genres that I also introduce in writing workshops since personal narrative is related to memoir, but doesn't generally include a major life lesson.

Before students embark on choice reading, I teach specific reading strategies. Syd Korsunsky has developed a series of activities based on the work of Rosenblatt (1983; 1994), Smith (2004), and the Child Centered Experience-based Learning (CEL) group to which he belonged for many years. I've most recently incorporated ideas from Keene and Simmermann's (2007) *Mosaic of Thought*.

I begin with "What Six Things Great Readers Do" (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). These

strategies are incorporated into exercises involving either narrative poetry, short story and/or

picture books. I have chosen to use narrative poetry first, because it supports questioning and

making inferences. I also provide specific questions that require students to apply the strategies

in their reading duotangs. I use this written information from students to create a "Running

Record" that enables me to determine the students who are struggling with specific concepts, and

those students who are more independent. This allows me to create a selection of appropriate

books for choice reading. However, as the school year progresses and sharing circles are the

norm, the students themselves become the best sources of new titles.

When I realize that most of the students in the class have had sufficient practice, I

formally launch the choice part of Reading Workshop. Students have silent reading periods

throughout the week. During these periods, I read alongside my students and model reading as I

model writing.

Another strategy to support independent reading is that of "Read Alouds." Rather than

novels that take a long time to read, I use picture books. Well written picture books lend

themselves to conversations around the strategies I want students to use, and they are a very

good way to introduce key elements such as theme (personal as well as the author's intended

theme) and character as it emerges and changes. Students write reading responses to whole class

Read Alouds and, eventually, write responses to books they are independently reading. My

Reading and Writing Workshop is designed to lead into inquiry though literature and more

independent inquiries. Syd Korsunsky developed the model that I use, as it allows students in my

classroom to create their own self-directed projects based on personal interests.

Inquiry through literature is a process by which students replicate the "authoring process" (Short & Burke, 1996). Students choose their own topic of interest or from a list of 20 provided topics; we connect their chosen topic to a related novel and group students accordingly. In their groups, students met 3-4 times to discuss the novel or novels they are reading and what they were thinking in relation to their topic. They apply the strategies we have been practicing all year with response to literature. Students complete summary/synthesis reflections after each discussion session. After completion of the novel, students review their questions in order to generate their "essential question(s)" for further inquiry. For example, after reading the novel *Rules* by Cynthia Lord and/or *House Rules* by Jodi Picoult, students might have come up with the question, "What is it like to live with someone who is living with autism?" We discuss with our students how to do secondary and then primary research. This is crucial: in this age of information overload, we needed to teach students how to access information, especially what is on-line.

After students develop a better understanding (schema) of their topic through secondary research (articles and on-line video "documentaries"), they can contact with an expert in the field to further their understanding of their topic area. Some conduct interviews, building on skills developed during a project at the beginning of the year. The final synthesis is where students take all their information and create something new from it. For example, I might ask them to consider the following scenario: if you were writing a novel about the topic, create 3 characters and have them tell their perspective of the issue based on the information from your research. The key ingredient throughout the project is student choice. It is essential for the engagement of the students in the activity. As students gain independence, they are capable of doing more

independent inquiry projects. In Appendix D is a list of beliefs I currently hold about Reading

and Writing Workshop. They underpin TELA's *Choice and Voice* philosophy.

Problem

> *You do not want to cover a subject; you want to uncover it* (Hawkins, 2000, as cited in
> Duckworth, 2006, p. 7).

In Manitoba, the draft of the new English Language Arts curriculum document (Manitoba

Education and Training, 2017) looks promising as it supports what are generally considered to be

best practices in the implementation of the stated goals. It promotes the learning of ELA in "rich

and complex contexts/experiences rather than a series of skills, strategies, or decontextualized

content" (Manitoba Education and Training, 2017, p. 8). ELA teachers are fortunate in being

able to tailor their instruction using this curriculum as a guide and factoring in the needs and

abilities of our individual students. Along with this freedom, however, comes responsibility.

Members of the TELA group have had to continue learning beyond their teacher certification

programs to understand what the curriculum is suggesting. Although the document and the

education of teachers are well intentioned, there seems to be a disconnect regarding how to

implement the curriculum using what are considered to be "best practices." That was certainly

the case in my experience. The issues continue at the national and classroom level. These issues

have been around since John Dewey (1902, 1933), Paulo Friere (1968) and the progressive

education era.

Friere (2000) argued that teachers must abandon the "educational goal of deposit-making

and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings and their relations with the

world" (p.79). Through an inquiry approach, we respond to problems, investigate, think

critically, dialogue with others and seek solutions. There is no need to have teachers on one end

as the holders of knowledge and students as receptacles of such knowledge. Freire (2000)

summarizes it best when he introduces a new concept: teacher-student with students-teacher. He

promotes teachers and students learning and growing together; "people teach each other,

mediated by the world" (Friere, 2000, p. 80). I have seen this occur with my own students as

Freire discusses: students who are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves/world

will feel challenged and more engaged to respond to that challenge (Friere, 2000).

National issues. In a recent Canadian report on student outcomes and school climate, the

OurSCHOOL (2017) survey revealed that 60% of students in Grades 7 and 8 in Canada are

intellectually engaged. The Canadian norm of students who are interested and motivated in their

learning is 37% (OurSCHOOL, 2017). These are disturbing percentages that need to be

addressed. According to a report from People for Education (2011) that used data administered

by Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), the percentage of students in

Grade 6 who "like to read" fell from 65% in 1998/1999 to 50% in 2010/2011. Further research

shows adolescent engagement in school (and in particular reading) drops every year (Gallagher-

Mackay, 2011). According to Guthrie and Davis (2003) the following factors are a few of those

that contribute to disengagement: reading is disconnected from content, intimidating textbooks,

formal non-personal response expectations, diminished student choice, isolation of students from

teachers, and minimal linkage to real-world interaction with reading. Ryan and Deci (2000)

maintain that struggling readers need choice to support their engagement. Adolescents,

particularly, seek independence and an opportunity to have some control over aspects of their

learning.

It is essential that teachers take action to prevent disengagement by giving students

choice in the literature they read and the topics they write about (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gallagher-

Mackay, 2011; Guthrie & Davis, 2003). In a survey of teachers' beliefs about increasing

engagement, participating teachers reported that giving choice is a strong motivational technique

(Nolen & Nicholls, 1994). In addition, there is a need to provide thoughtful instruction and

timely feedback (Atwell, 2015; NCTE, 2017; Reif, 2014). As important, teachers must provide

students with access to *great* literature. Among the number of beliefs espoused by the National

Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2014), one in particular stands out for me: "Students

should, as much as possible, have choice and control over topics, forms, language, themes, and

other aspects of their own writing while meeting course requirements" (NCTE, 2014). Through

the workshop-based approach, it is possible to foster meaningful relationships, as teachers and

students share their learning with each other. This fuels a teacher's connection to her students,

and it is such relationships that form the foundation of the practice the TELA teachers implement

to promote autonomy, agency and a sense of well-being.

     21st Century education. Choosing books and writing topics that are meaningful to

students are important pedagogical strategies, but they aren't an end in themselves. In the same

way, the building blocks towards learning complex strategies that integrate reading and writing

into larger inquiry projects are, by themselves, insufficient and too often constraining. Inquiry-

based approaches to literature connect to 21st century notions of curriculum such as those

expressed by Westhiemer and Kahne (2004) that are focused on citizenship. They describe three

conceptions of the "good" citizen: personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented. A

justice-oriented citizen, "critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see

beyond surface causes, seeks out and addresses areas of injustice and knows about social

movements and how to effect systemic change" (p. 240). As the world's population grows and

environmental limits are being reached, "educational practice needs to change to better prepare

citizens to address the rising economic, social, and environmental challenges of the 21st century. This requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for a sustainable future" (Learning for a Sustainable Future, Educators, Pedagogical Resources section, para.1).

Aoki (1989) describes the work of Bettel and Eisner, two academics grounded in art education, who tried to delve deeper into the structure underlying curriculum research. They called into question the "constraining mould of tradition" (Aoki, 1989, p. 4). Similarly, Michael Apple (1975) argued that educators need to be more self-reflective and less reliant on the "interest-free, scientific method" of teaching that creates restrictive environments (as cited in Aoki, 1989, p. 4). Aoki makes use of Freire's (1972; 1973) "limit-situation" to suggest that curriculum theorists seem to be stuck. From Aoki's (1989) perspective, there is a need for a more humane, value driven educational environment (p. 5).

Allowing students to wrestle with ideas within their capability creates a sense of discovery. When an element of improvisation is added to a classroom, right/correct and wrong/incorrect turn into tools that allow one to navigate possibility rather than the finite answers required of the mechanistic factory style education system (Reflective Learning Journal, November 28, 2017). Traditional models of education leave teachers and students with a potential inability to be reflective. The restrictions on learning diminish the real creativity of humans. In order for learners to be active 21st century citizens, they need to practice using language as power and agency in the context of learning experiences, outlined in the revised Manitoba ELA curriculum, that enable students to

    - recognize and analyze inequities, viewpoints, and bias in texts and ideas

- investigate complex moral and ethical issues and conflicts

- contemplate the actions that can be taken, consider alternate view points and contribute

others perspectives (Manitoba Education and Training, 2017, p. 14).

Classroom-based issues. One major reason that subject-centered curricula still exist is

that the school is seen as a place to maximize "high status knowledge" in order to fill economic

and social positions in a stratified society (Apple, 1990, p. 38). However, this focus on high

status knowledge using an information-transmission approach has been discredited by John

Dewey (2009), Ralph Tyler (1949) and by years of research in the areas of cognition, education

and literacy (Wilhelm, 2007). No longer should we value teaching subjects in isolation with the

memorization of facts being the emphasis (Babiuk & Falkenberg, 2010). With a *Choice and

Voice* approach, students are given the support and encouragement to be able to think for

themselves. Fortunately, inquiry is at the heart of several of Manitoba's curriculum documents,

as is interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Manitoba's Ministry of Education actually enables

and supports what the TELA group is trying to do.

Through the Reading and Writing Workshop and the inquiries that emanate from the

workshop, the students I have the opportunity to teach are making sense of the world. This sense

making enhances their ability to produce quality work in the inquiries they undertake. Reading

and Writing Workshops are a valuable end in themselves; but when we move towards inquiry we

are scaffolding what students have learned in the workshops. With a *Choice and Voice* approach,

a teacher shifts from addressing a sequence of learning outcomes in a unit and uses these

outcomes to create essential questions for students to explore and then to act upon. When I began

using this approach in my teaching practice, I started identifying what is relevant in our world

today and in the lives of middle years students. I now structure my teaching (and my own

learning) around that relevance and subsequently identify the overlap present in curriculum documents. Choice occurs in a number of ways, but the key is that in representing their learning students are able to create something new, and demonstrate the higher order cognitive skill of synthesis.

Research Question and Purpose

In this study I investigated the research question: How does a choice/voice teaching approach in English Language Arts impact middle years students' agency for well-being? With this approach, I aimed to foster autonomy, with the goal to develop students' agency as well-being. If students feel empowered and well, I hope their classroom life will be enhanced. My larger goal is for students to become lifelong learners who find a place for reading and writing beyond the classroom. It is not what they learn, but how they learn that I am hoping impacts my students' lives, as it has mine. My purpose as a member of the teaching profession is to describe authentic practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences in compelling ways through various writing genres. The research presented aims to reveal how such an autonomy supportive practice impacts student agency and well-being.

Throughout my twelve years of teaching and seven years working alongside a group of like-minded TELA colleagues, I have noticed that there is not enough choice and voice for students' learning in the classroom. As a student myself in the Education for Sustainability and Wellbeing cohort at the University of Manitoba, I appreciated the freedom in directing my own learning. Many class discussions centered strongly on wellbeing and how there needs to be more choice, inquiry, and project-based learning offered to students in order to promote engagement. In my teaching, I see a strong connection between a *Choice and Voice* approach and wellbeing.

However, I have uncovered little research connecting the notion of choice and voice with well-being in the classroom.

Assumptions of the Study

In designing the study, I assumed that many middle years teachers are not providing their students with opportunities for choice and voice in their learning. In addition, I assumed that students' learning is more sustained and promotes a sense of wellbeing when they are given choice in inquiring into, and writing/reading about, what matters to them. I also assumed that the students I planned to interview would respond and have felt some positive impact on their sense of wellbeing from this approach.

Definition of Terms

If we are not teaching kids how to understand and how to apply what they know, what is it that we are really teaching? If we are not teaching for these purposes, then we are simply 'doing school.' (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 9)

Well-being. Well-being cannot be defined simply as happiness. Martin E.P. Seligman's (2011) first chapter in *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, reveals an in-depth theory of what makes a good life. Well-being is viewed as a construct with several contributing elements that are each measurable and aim to increase flourishing (Seligman, 2011). These elements involve happiness as positive emotion, along with engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment; also known as the mnemonic, PERMA (Seligman, 2011). Similarly, in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) well-being can be defined as "the freedom of choice to achieve the things in life which one has reason to value most for his or her personal life" (Sen as cited in Muffels & Headey, 2011, p. 1159). Finally, the developers of the self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (1995) argue that true self and well-

being develops as one "acts volitionally (autonomously), experiences an inner sense of efficacy (competence), and is loved (feels related to)" (p. 33). I am primarily using the self-determination theory definition of well-being because the three psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness encompasses the well-being indicators of Seligman (2011) and the importance of having choice that Sen (2011) articulates.

Agency. The concept of free agency is described by Cuypers and Haji (2008) as our actions being 'truly our own' or autonomous (p. 72). Agency involves not only the "ability to make choices and action plans, but also the ability to construct appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Thus, to be agentic is to be self-determined.

Agency for well-being. This study examines the relationship of the *Choice and Voice* approach on students' agency for well-being. By "agency for well-being", I mean students' realization that they have the ability to do something effectively (competence), that their activities are self-directed (autonomy), that they feel connected to others (relatedness) and can behave agentically. As noted in the above definitions of well-being and agency, the self-determination theory suggests that as one acts agentically within an environment that allows satisfaction of the three needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, one would experience a positive sense of well-being. In turn, increased well-being can lead to further agency. For the purpose of this study, I am incorporating a clearer definition of agency within the self-determination theory. That is, once the three needs are being met, the behaviors that result are agentic and can lead to well-being. Within the three needs of autonomy, competency and relatedness I have noticed sub-themes that I will further discuss in Chapter 4 and 5.

Choice and voice. Choice in the TELA approach begins within a structure as we move towards a gradual release of responsibility on the part of the teacher. It has been our experience that teachers who give unlimited choice without this structure have found the results to be chaotic and often abandoned the approach altogether. The kind of continuum that TELA members follow is more thoroughly discussed in later chapters. "Self-determination is a quality of human functioning that involves the experience of choice" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 38).

Voice can be in terms of what students choose, how they express their beliefs about issues in the world as well as the style in which they write (Romano, 2004). Often students first find their "voice" in Writer's Workshop as they craft pieces that matter to them. For the purpose of the TELA approach, voice is defined as a student's ability to bring his/her own perspectives of the world to learning situations.

Critical and creative thinking. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2007) has developed a framework that defines critical thinking as the ability to reason effectively, to use systems thinking, to make judgments and decisions, and to solve problems. Creativity and innovation involves thinking creatively, creating new ideas, working creatively with others and implementing innovations (2007). The learning and innovation skills are defined in detail on the P21 website.

Inquiry-based learning. The inquiry approach "uncovers" the same content as a curriculum-centered model, however, it puts students in the position of interpreting the material (Wilhelm, 2007). Students are the ones asking the questions rather than passively receiving information. Research in cognition shows that "reading and writing are forms of inquiry, and are best learned in contexts of inquiry and through the questioning and discourse that is central to it" (Hillocks, 1999, 2002 as cited in Wilhelm, 2007, p. 10). Wilhelm (2007) defines inquiry as the

"process of addressing problems expressed by guiding questions" (p. 10). Throughout the inquiry process students learn to use problem solving tools to construct understandings, and they engage in the same process as an expert would do in the field of study (Wilhelm, 2007). Inquiry-driven classrooms motivate, engage and enable students to think critically, form deeper understandings and foster positive attitudes towards future learning (Wilhelm, 2007).

Inquiry is not simply finding information about an assigned topic. It is the active process of going beyond what is known, seeing new connections, reflecting and creating new knowledge (Wilhelm, 2009). According to Wilhelm's (2007) review of the relevant research, this inquiry model of teaching is proven to be the most successful way to teach and learn. Rather than focus on how to provide information to students, inquiry focuses on the "what and the who of the learner, the who of the expert, the how of reading and learning and most of all on the why of learning" (Wilhelm, 2009, p. 9).

Organization of the Thesis

In the previous paragraphs I've attempted to make clear why this is a pedagogical area of interest to me. In Chapter Two I review the relevant published research and the gaps in the literature that my research is designed to address. Research on the behaviours that emanate from having competency, autonomy and relatedness is lacking. In Chapter Three I explain my methodology and methods used in the research. Chapter Four describes the results of the recruitment process, my coding of themes and sub-themes and the overall findings. I present the data in tables of students' quotes organized around the themes. Chapter Five is focused on an analysis and discussion of the themes in relation to the literature and a presentation of the conclusions emerging from this analysis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As I think about the way I began my teaching career, I recognize that I centered my practice around ways of teaching that had been used in teaching me. It is also how I observed almost all other teachers teaching. I thought, *This is the way it's supposed to be, so why deviate?* After all, attending to the norm is easier than challenging the system. It seems like many educators are content with conventional ways of teaching, and that generating or implementing new ideas in the classroom is considered too much work, another fad, or feared. It's easier to adhere to prevailing ideas and established ways of knowing. However, in doing so, creative thought, student voice and choice can be kept to a minimum or at the very least compromised.

Ironically, the more I've implemented a *Choice and Voice* approach, the more I've come to realize that my teaching reflects the current foundations of curriculum documents. Pedagogical techniques I was using earlier in my career were, in fact, not supported by curriculum documents, as they included learning in isolation, memorization of facts, hand-outs and one-size fits all learning.

I've recognized that teachers need to move beyond their intransigence and explore new ideas. Palmer (1997) describes what happens when we are open to take in the greatness of the world: "Eyes wide with wonder, we no longer need to resist or run when taken by surprise" (p. 113). This quote not only describes my experiences to date, but also articulates what I hope for my students as I encourage student voice, inquiry, accepting challenges and an appreciation of our world. As an educator, I now see myself as always learning alongside my students. However, I did not start out like this. I too feared the unknown and the thought of opening up a

variety of topics for students to explore, with no idea where each topic would go, overwhelmed me. But, with the help of my TELA colleagues, I was pushed out of my comfort zone into working alongside the students on topics I knew little about. (Reflective Learning Journal, January 11, 2016).

The following review of the literature will describe how an agentic/autonomy supportive practice impacts student well-being. To be an agent is, "to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances...in this conception, people are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1991; Ryan, 1995) suggests that personal well-being is a function of the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. There is also research being done that aims to understand the importance of providing students with choice and voice in their own learning (Ballet, Biggeri, & Comim, 2011; Bandura, 2006; Birdsell, Ream, Seyller, & Zobott, 2009; Cuypers & Haji, 2008; Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010; Nussbaum, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Simmons, Graham, & Thomas., 2015; Soutter, O'Steen, & Gilmore, 2012). However, knowledge about how this participation might contribute to change and improve schools is limited (Cook-Sather, 2006, as cited in Simmons et al., 2015). As Cook-Sather argues, "There is something fundamentally amiss about building and rebuilding an entire system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve" (as cited in Simmons et al., 2015, p. 4). Therefore, I find it of relevance to hear from students and research autonomy supportive practices that positively impact student agency and well-being.

The following review is organized around my conceptual framework and the literature focused on student choice, voice, engagement, agency and well-being. It is these ideas and

theories that will inform my data analysis. In addition, there are specific aspects of the self-determination theory, convention on the rights of the child and the capability approach that will be used to formulate interview questions and inform the interpretation of my data. These aspects are described immediately after the conceptual framework below.

Conceptual Framework

Social constructivism is the worldview or paradigm that informs the design of my study. It is the learning theory that guided my pedagogical approach of giving students choice and voice in their learning. This worldview assumes that "reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Social constructivism informs interpretative research in that researchers do not "find knowledge; they construct it" (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016, p. 9). Creswell (2013) explains that in this worldview, individuals develop varied subjective meanings of their experiences, which are negotiated socially and historically. Thus, meaning develops through interaction with others. Phenomenology will guide my research approach as I gain insights into learners' experiences. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three that focuses on my research methodology and method.

Self Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is an approach to human motivation and personality using empirical methods that highlight the importance of resources for personality development and behavioural self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This study, guided by SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1995) suggests personal well-being is a function of the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. The need for competence is fulfilled by one's ability to do something effectively; the need for autonomy involves perceiving that one's activities are self-directed, and the need for relatedness pertains to feeling that one is

close and connected to others (Reis, H. T., Sheldon, K. M., Gable, S. L., Roscoe, J., & Ryan, R.

M. 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that these needs are the basis for self-motivation and

overall personal well-being. For the purpose of this study, the term *agency for well-being* will

mean the ability to show competency, autonomy and relatedness, which in turn leads to enhanced

motivation and personal well-being. Interview questions will be guided by the self-determination

theory indicators of well-being.

Autonomy support towards agentic engagement. Ryan and Deci maintain that teachers

who are autonomy supportive provide choice and opportunities for self-direction, as both have

been found to enhance intrinsic motivation and the desire for challenge. It's important to note

that it is not only provision of autonomy support that enhances student motivation and

engagement but also the provision of structure (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010). In the classroom,

"[e]ngagement expresses the behavioral intensity and emotional quality of a student's active

involvement during a learning activity" (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Skinner, Furrer,

Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008; Wellborn, 1991, as cited in Jang et al., 2010, p. 588).

According to published studies, when teachers focus on supporting students' "autonomous

motives (e.g., interests, needs, preferences, personal goals)," students are more engaged in their

learning activities (Jang et al., 2010, p. 588). In addition, when teachers provide structure by

guiding learning activities with clear expectations and directions, engagement is further

supported as students are more on task and behaviour is manageable, rather than a lack of clear

expectations, resulting in chaos (Jang et al., 2010). Throughout the researchers' investigation,

they found a strong connection between autonomy support and structure: autonomy within a

structured framework supports students' classroom engagement.

In order for teachers to promote student autonomy and nurture intrinsic motivation, they create learning activities around students' interests, encourage choice making, a sense of challenge and curiosity, rather than relying on extrinsic incentives (Jang et al., 2010). When autonomy supportive teachers acknowledge the students' thoughts and feelings, they demonstrate that they value the students' perspectives during learning activities, which leads to students displaying a range of positive educational outcomes such as engagement (Jang et al., 2010). With moderate structure, by providing students with helpful guidance, scaffolding and feedback throughout activities, students experienced further engagement (Jang et al., 2010).

Student engagement in academic learning has frequently been researched as an important educational outcome and as an indicator of students' positive functioning. Research has emerged to characterize engagement as a three-component construct featuring behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). It is also well understood that student engagement rises and falls in response to lessons that are challenging as opposed to easy, levels of teacher's expression, provision of structure and support for autonomy (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). Reeve and Tseng (2011) propose adding agentic engagement as a new aspect, which is defined as "students' constructive contribution into the flow of instruction they receive" (p. 257). The researchers conducted their study to reveal a more accurate portrayal of what happens when a teacher presents students with a lesson. Students not only react with displays of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement, but they also act agentically to try to make the learning activity more enjoyable by modifying it, personalizing it, expressing a preference and, overall, to gain access for better understanding (Reeve & Tseng, 2011).

In the study conducted by Reeve and Tseng (2011), high school students from Taiwan completed surveys of their classroom motivation and aspects of engagement. The study pursued

three goals: "to validate a new measure of agentic engagement, to test whether agency was a

distinct engagement component, and to determine if agentic engagement was educationally

important by assessing the extent to which it mediated the motivation-to-achievement

relationship" (Reeve & Tseng, 2011, p. 263). Through the researchers' analysis, agentic

engagement was found to be a distinct and important aspect associated with students' motivation.

It was noted that "when teachers are autonomy supportive, rather than

controlling…students' psychological need satisfaction and engagement increase" (Reeve &

Tseng, 2011, p. 264). If teachers create a classroom environment where students feel free to

express opinions, pursue interests and ask questions, they will have more ability to be agentically

engaged in their own learning. In adding the concept of agentic engagement to educational

discourse, more attention can be drawn to increasing students' self-efficacy, personal goals, and

individual interests.

Reeve and Tseng's 2011 study reveals the important, though often neglected, ways that

students contribute to the instruction they receive. The literature on negotiated power suggests

that "students need to be allowed by teachers to negotiate various aspects of the classroom

curriculum and decision making" (Reeve & Tseng, 2011, p. 265). The researchers conclude by

discussing possible future research to explore ways that might more fully characterize the

process in which students contribute to the flow of instruction.

In order to aid in future research, Reeve and Tseng articulate five essential characteristics

of agentic engagement. These characteristics are as follows: 1) it is proactive, 2) it is intentional,

3) it tries to enrich the learning opportunity by making it more personal and interesting, 4) it

contributes constructive input into the planning or flow of instruction so that the student has a

say and 5) it does not imply teacher incompetence (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). They suggest further

studies to better understand how cognitive engagement (through critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis) contributes to students' positive outcomes would be beneficial (p. 265). Overall, their work reveals the importance in appreciating students' contributions to their own learning.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

There are various definitions of child well-being. The child rights perspective defines well-being as "the realization of the child's rights and the fulfillment of the opportunity for the child to be all he or she can be in light of the child's abilities, potential, and skills (Doek, 2014, p. 205). On November 20, 1989, The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and this made well-being the right of the child (Doek, 2014). One principle of the CRC is "the right of the child to express her or his views and have them taken into account" (Doek, 2014, p. 206).

Within the education system, the CRC promotes children having a voice and taking an active participatory role in their learning environment in order to help children deal with possible conflicts (Doek, 2014). The recognition of the child's right to free expression contributes to the well-being of the child, as it encourages engagement in the development of decision-making skills (Doek, 2014). Finally, it is noted that the recognition of a child's right to be heard may, "strengthen the child's sense of self-worth, self- esteem, and empowerment" (Doek, 2014, p. 208).

According to the CRC, the key goal of education is the development of a child's personality and abilities in order to "participate fully and responsibly in a free society" (Doek, 2014, p. 210). It is noted that education that focuses on knowledge accumulation and competition is detrimental to promoting a child-centered education. The CRC is important in promoting the

well-being of children, particularly children's health, opportunities to grow and learn, feeling

safe, positive relationships, feeling respected, and having a voice that is listened to (Doek, 2014).

Student Voice and Well-being. The article, "Imagining an Ideal School for Wellbeing:

Locating Student Voice," reports on a study in Australia that investigated how 'wellbeing' in

schools is understood by exploring the importance of actively engaging with students about

issues that matter to them (Simmons et al., 2015). Simmons, et al. (2015) interviewed 606

students aged 6-17 and asked them to imagine, draw and discuss an ideal school that promoted

their well-being. The students emphasized the importance of "opportunities to have a say" in

relation to pedagogy, the school environment and relationships (Simmons et al., 2015, p. 1). This

reveals the importance of a more "democratic, participatory and inclusive approach to change

and improvement in schools" (Simmons et al., 2015, p. 1). The authors pose the question: "Why

look into well-being?" (Simmons et al., 2015, p. 2). Internationally, there is concern about the

wellbeing of children from organizations such as United Nations International Children's

Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2013) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) (2016), which monitor the performance of countries across a range of

well-being indicators, including education.

Simmons and colleagues (2015) suggest a need for a change in "mindset" towards a more

reflexive approach to the ways student 'participation' is understood in education. There is

significant research on the importance of children's participation in a range of contexts other than

education, such as research in family law, child protection and out-of-home care (Simmons et al.,

2015). The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child has informed these fields on

the importance of positioning children and young people as worthy of "dignity, status and voice"

(Simmons et al., 2015, p. 4).

With this in mind, a major study in Australia is focusing on how well-being is understood and facilitated in schools by collecting data from students alongside teachers and principals in order to bring all perspectives together with the goal of influencing positive educational change (Simmons et al., 2015). The findings of the study revealed that a 'well-being school' would address improvements to pedagogy, school environment, relationships, and opportunities to have a say. According to the 13-14 year old students' reflections on pedagogy, they wanted to "learn things we actually need", "lifelong lessons", "interactive lessons", and "more elective choices" (Simmons et al., 2015, p. 12). Moreover, there was a strong theme around the importance of having a 'voice' regarding school procedures and a sense of agency to influence change within their schools (Simmons et al., 2015).

It is clear from this Australian study that the students' vision of well-being involved "relationships, as reflected in approaches to pedagogy, school structures that help facilitate relationships, the importance of feeling safe and secure, the capacity to have fun, the desire for understanding, better communication, equality and respect, and more opportunities for students to be heard and involved in school life" (Simmons et al., 2015, p. 18). The authors discuss the connection between student voice and well-being evidenced in the published research of de Róiste, Kelly, Molcho, Gavin, and Gabhainn (2012) and Rowe, Stewart, & Patterson (2007). Osler (2010) reveals a lack of student voice in school as impacting on student wellbeing. It is frustrating for students when they are not consulted about issues impacting them; this adds stress to relationships between students and teachers (Osler, 2010).

Unfortunately, opportunities for student voice continue to be scarce, with adults having the main authority to speak on matters of educational change and improvement in schools (Kellett, 2010). In addition, efforts at increased student participation need to be authentic and

sustainable rather than tokenistic or symbolic (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001). There are competing

values and interests in regard to the agenda at play in the education system. As Patton et al.,

(2000) suggest, there needs to be a "change in the culture of teaching toward greater

collaborative relationships among teachers and students" (p. 590).

The Capability Approach to Education

Similar to the child rights perspective, the capability approach views children as "...not

simply recipients of freedoms, but as active social actors and agents in their communities with

their own priorities, strategies and aspirations" (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 22). From this standpoint,

children are perceived to have agency and autonomy, thus, the capabilities, choices and

conditions experienced in childhood affect them in adulthood (Ballet et al., 2011). Without such

opportunities in childhood, well-being is reduced and may result in larger societal implications in

the future (Klasen, 2001 as cited in Ballet et al., 2011). To some extent, the process of agency

requires that a person should be making his or her own choices. According to Sen, that aspect of

freedom is not often relevant to the rights of children (as cited in Ballet et al., 2011).

The concern associated with children's participation is that they have minimal autonomy

and capacity for self-determination (Ballet et al., 2011). As a consequence, the concept of

"evolving capabilities is central to the balance embodied in the CRC between recognizing

children as active agents in their own lives, entitled to be listened to, respected and granted

increasing autonomy in the exercise of rights, while also being entitled to protection in

accordance with their relative immaturity and youth" (Landsdown as cited in Ballet et al., 2011,

p. 23). The perception that children are not mature enough to make decisions for themselves and

the question of extending to all individuals this freedom of choice is argued by Saito (as cited in

Ballet et al., 2001). Ballet et al. (2011), however, contend that excluding children from choice implies their lack of cognitive capacity to make decisions.

Ballet et al. (2011) assert that it is not so much that children are unable to make choices, but that they might not be as capable of evaluating and revising those choices. That being said, the authors note that there is rarely a distinction between the capacity to make choices and the capacity to evaluate them (Ballet et al., 2011). If children are dismissed as incapable of making choices, how will they ever learn? Ballet and colleagues (2011) believe it is necessary to provide children with choices within a framework in order to avoid harmful choices and to develop their ability to evaluate such choices. The authors pose the question: "Can individuals learn to be autonomous if they are not given any autonomy space?" (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 28).

In educating children, parents and teachers can either be autonomy supportive (allowing choices, encouraging self-perspective) or controlling (pressure to behave in certain ways) (Ballet et al., 2011). On one hand, children desire to be more independent, but on the other hand, they do require parental care. Autonomy-facilitating education considers "evolving capabilities and (a) strives not to control children, but to provide boundaries to support them," and (b) attempts to develop "freedom of choice in the sense of a capacity to evaluate and revise choices" (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 30).

Ballet et al. (2011) point out the implications for education as a result of recognizing children as having different degrees of autonomy. Fostering their participation is key in the process of evolving capabilities in their development, specifically, their agency (Ballet et al., 2011). According to the capability approach, education:

Should not be reduced to the mechanical transmission of instrumental skills (as important

as they might be), but should promote learning environments where children can learn to

flourish as human beings, dream and have aspirations in addition to learning how to read,

write and count. (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 37)

Ballet et al. (2011) conclude by reiterating the importance of children's participation in

decision-making processes as regards to their well-being. This means that educators must be

concerned with "the formation of children's capacity for critical thinking and capability to aspire

and develop participatory methods that are suitable for different ages" (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 40).

Central Capabilities. Martha Nussbaum's (2011) chapter, "The Central Capabilities",

investigates Amartya Sen's "Capabilities Approach" as a way to compare quality of life and to

theorize about social justice. Sen originally framed the approach to evaluate and assess quality of

lives to enhance individual freedom and make practical improvements (Nussbaum, 2011). The

choices people make depend on their capabilities, which impact their well-being. However, it is

argued that societal and economic contexts put constraints on the choices and, therefore, impact

well-being outcomes (Muffels & Headey, 2011). In Muffels and Headey's (2011) examination of

the impact capabilities and choices have on well-being, the findings support the positive effect

choices have on well-being.

Nussbaum's (2011) version of the "Capabilities Approach" constructs a theory of social

justice and includes a list of central capabilities. It focuses on choice or freedom, recognizes that

values range in quality and quantity and cannot be reduced to a numerical value and finally is

concerned with issues of social injustice and inequality with a task to improve the quality of life

for all people. Nussbaum (2011) asks the questions, "What is each person able to do and to be?" and examines what real opportunities are available to them (p. 20).

Nussbaum (2011) developed a list of ten "Central Capabilities" that promote conditions for people to live decent socially just lives. She argues that societies should provide their citizens these capabilities. They are: 1) the right to a complete life, 2) the right to bodily health and 3) integrity, 4) the right to freedom of thought and 5) emotion, 6) the ability to critically reflect on one's life 7) and to affiliate with others, 8) to be able to form one's own concern for other species, 9) to be able to play and enjoy leisure time, and 10) the right to have some control over one's material and political environment (Nussbaum, 2011). These components are considered to be essential for social justice. As Nussbaum (2011) claims, "respect for human dignity requires that citizens be placed above an ample (specified) threshold of capability in all ten of those areas" (p. 36).

Impact of Choice Strategies on Student Well-being

The literature reveals that, in general, "[b]y the time students reach middle school, lack of interest in schoolwork becomes increasingly apparent in more and more students" (Lumsden as cited in Birdsell et al, 2009, p. 7). Reasons for this lack of motivation include intrinsic and extrinsic factors, as well as teachers creating low motivation by not possessing enough enthusiasm, not giving students choice, and/ or not cultivating a relationship with students (Brewster & Fager as cited in Birdsell et al., 2009). A study by Birdsell, Ream, Seyller and Zobott (2009) examined the change in motivational levels of 7th grade students as a result of choice strategies. The purpose of this study was to increase student motivation by offering "choice on curriculum, grouping, assignments and assessment" (p. 12).

The school in which the research was conducted is located in an urban midwestern community in the United States. After reviewing the pre-intervention data, the researchers inferred that the lack of motivation was related to the students' ownership of their learning (Birdsell et al., 2009). There was a need to increase student motivation based on the low-test scores, lack of participation in activities, incomplete work and disinterest in becoming learners. The authors' review of relevant literature offered six strategies that can be used to promote motivation in the classroom: "positive feedback, appropriate challenge levels, atmosphere, teacher's role, cooperative learning, and student choice" (Birdsell et al., 2009, p. 41). Students are more likely to be engaged if they feel as if they have choice in the activity. For example, if a student is able to choose a book they are interested in, their motivation for reading will increase, which would in turn impact their reading comprehension (Guthrie, 2003). Birdsell and colleagues concluded that "validating middle school students' desire for freedom through the offering of choice produced more positive behaviors and an increase of self-motivation" (Birdsell et al., 2009, p. i).

The Student Well-being Model (SWBM) provides a set of student well-being indicators based upon a case study analysis of New Zealand secondary school education policies, and a qualitative investigation into students' and teachers' perspectives and experiences on well-being (Soutter et al., 2012). Soutter et al., (2012) aimed to develop a model that could assist students and educators with understanding well-being and to develop a framework that could inform curriculum design, policy and program development. The seven foundational elements of the SWBM were identified through a multidisciplinary review of well-being literature. The seven domains are as follows: having, being, relating, feeling, thinking, functioning, and striving. Each domain represents a specific dimension of well-being (Soutter et al., 2012).

In regards to students "being" well, students feel "known for whom they are" and believe they are "taken seriously" by others (Soutter et al., 2012, p. 505). Schools that support well-being establish clear expectations and provide opportunities for students to act autonomously. That is, students are encouraged to make informed decisions and teachers provide feedback and clearly articulate skills and competencies. Another domain of significance is that of thinking well. The authors question how student choice and decision making is even doable in today's schools given compartmentalized scheduling and assessment driven learning. Thinking well involves "the opportunity to make informed decisions from a wide range of choices available" (Soutter et al., 2012, p. 508). Thus, it is important to move away from the traditional schooling models that typically prevent students "learning to learn" (Soutter et al., 2012, p. 508).

Soutter et al. (2012) ask, "How important is student choice for functioning well?" In order to function well in school, Wiggins & McTighe (2005) argued that educational experiences "integrate the expertise of students, teachers, peers, and community members and are typically focused around developing 'enduring understanding' through engagement with and critical reflection upon essential questions" (as cited in Soutter et al., 2012, p. 509). Schools that support well-being provide opportunities for student interest driven inquires whereby students experience a state of "flow" (Soutter et al., 2012). In order for this to occur, close following of scheduling may be sacrificed to allow students to gain in-depth understanding and insight that comes from 'uncoverage', rather than coverage of material (Wiggins & McTighe, as cited in Soutter et al., 2012). Without going into further detail into each of the seven domains of the SWBM, it is clear that the indicators reveal students' conceptualizations of well-being and offer practical suggestions for promoting well-being in practice.

Connecting Well-being and Agency

Cuypers and Haji (2008) propose a connection between maximizing well-being and free agency: the concept of our actions being 'truly our own' or autonomous (p. 72). They suggest that it is the "freedom that moral responsibility requires that bridges the aim of securing well-being on the one hand, and the subsidiary aim of promoting autonomy on the other" (p. 71). Thus, there is a connection between the aim of well-being and promoting autonomy: "seeing to it that our children develop into individuals who are self-governing in the conduct of their lives" (Cuypers & Haji, 2008, p. 72).

The authors argue that "well-being is enhanced when the intrinsic attitudinal pleasures of life are free, in the sense of being caused by springs of action that are autonomous" (Cuypers & Haji, 2008, p. 74). Therefore, an important aim of education should be to allow choice in making decisions and autonomy in order to develop students' well-being. Cuypers and Haji (2008) maintain that a choice needs to be free, in that "its agent both has control in making it and is autonomous with respect to it" (p. 82). In general, they argue that well-being is maximized if one's choices are free.

In addition, Seligman's well-being theory incorporates the following core states of mind: "positive emotions, engagement, interest, meaning and purpose" (Seligman, 2011, p. 27). Seligman describes that it is "essentially a theory of uncoerced choice, and its five elements comprise what free people will choose for their own sake" (Seligman, 2011, p. 16). Thus, in order to have a good sense of well-being and agency, an individual must have the ability to choose to maximize all five of these elements (Seligman, 2011). It is clear that these elements are contained within the self-determination theory and have the potential to lead to having agency for well-being.

Bandura and human agency. Albert Bandura (2006) presents an agentic theory of human development, adaptation and change. In this theory, "people are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them" (p. 164). Bandura identifies four core properties of human agency: agents are planners, freethinkers, self-regulators and self-examiners. In the educational field, students have the ability to exercise more control over their own learning. Bandura discusses how students' education in the past was dependent on the schools they attended. In contrast, students currently have the best instruction at their fingertips through the use of the Internet, and they can educate themselves and be "agents of their own learning, not just recipients of information" (Bandura, 2006, p. 176). Bandura (2006) maintains that "[e]ducation for self-directedness is now vital for a productive and innovative society" and that students with "high perceived efficacy for self-regulated learning" will do well in inquiry-based learning (p. 176). He concludes by advising that the challenge at the broader social level is to further examine how to enlist these agentic capabilities in ways that shape a better sustainable future (Bandura, 2006).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in the previous pages demonstrates the importance of providing students with choice and voice in their learning. To begin the review, I outlined the conceptual framework that informs the design of my study, social constructivism, as well as important aspects of self determination theory, The Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Capability Approach to education. The self-determination theory described by Ryan and Deci (2000) argues that autonomy is the basis for self-motivation and personal well-being. The child right's perspective and a major well-being study in Australia found that students having a voice

is essential in developing a sense of agency to influence change (Simmons, et al., 2015). However, it is the voice of the students that is lacking in the literature.

In order to study specifically how a *Choice and Voice* approach impacts students, I researched the published ideas and theories related to student choice, voice, engagement, autonomy, agency and well-being. The Student Well-being Model (Soutter et al., 2012) and the Central Capability Approach (Nussbaum, 2011) show the impact of choice on well-being. The research connecting well-being and agency by Albert Bandura (2006) reveals an agentic theory of human development that argues for students to be in more control of their learning. Throughout my research I aim to shed light on how a *Choice and Voice* approach impacts students on a deeper level.

As I explored well-being in its implications for education, it is clear that there are strong connections between providing students with choice and voice in developing their autonomy and agency (see Figure 1). The studies indicated that giving students a say, and fostering meaningful relationships as learning is shared, increases student motivation and engagement. In turn, this impacts students' ability to take action on their learning within and beyond the classroom.

Figure 1: Agency for Well-being Mind map
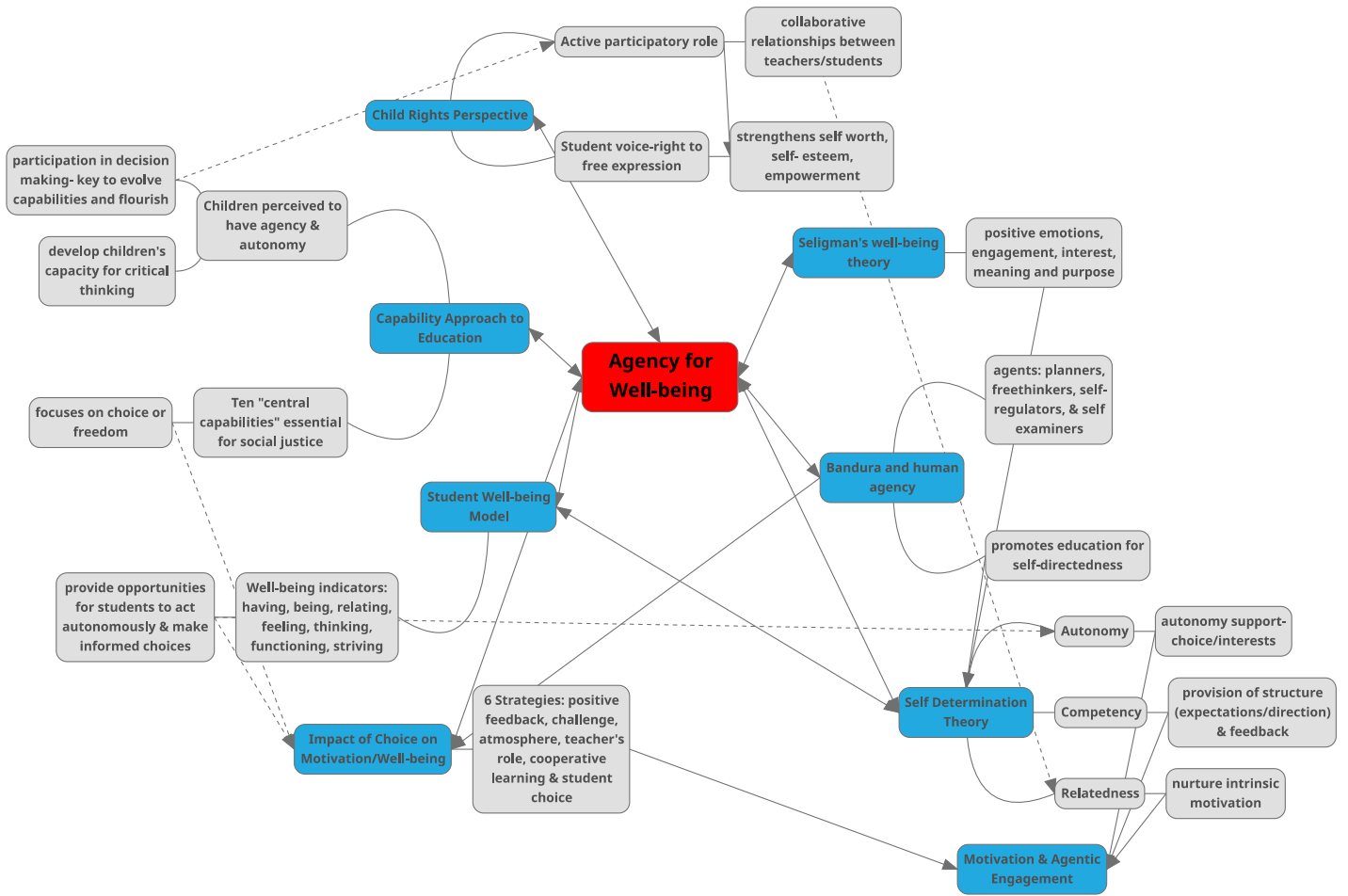
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

   Research indicates the importance of providing students with a degree of choice in order to improve autonomy, engagement, and overall well-being (Ballet et al., 2011; Cuypers & Haji, 2008;, Reeve, & Deci, 2010; Nussbaum, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). If this is the case, why aren't all teachers providing students with choice? One reason may be that knowledge about how this connection might contribute to change and improve schools is limited (Cook-Sather, 2006, as cited in Simmons et al., 2015). Another concern is that children are seen as lacking the capacity for self-determination and autonomy (Ballet et al., 2011).

   There is little research on a deeper understanding of the connection between a choice-based, agency-promoting teaching method and its impact on student well-being. I am interested in uncovering how, to what degree, and why a specific literacy/inquiry approach fosters student agency and impacts well-being. I aim to reveal a greater understanding of this connection.

Purpose Statement

   There is gap in our knowledge of how choice impacts student well-being. As such, there is a need for a change in "mindset" towards a more reflexive approach to the way student participation is understood in education (Simmons et al., 2015). Fostering student participation is key in the process of evolving capabilities in their development, specifically, their development of agency (Ballet et al., 2011). In this study, I have given students a voice in discussing how participation in choice-based experiences has impacted their agency for well-being. The question I intended to answer is as follows: How does a choice/voice teaching approach in English Language Arts impact middle years students' agency for well-being?

De-limitations of the Study

"Delimitations are choices made by the researcher which should be mentioned. They describe the boundaries set by the researcher for the study" (F. Morin, personal communication, August, 8, 2017). As such, delimitations focus on the following: the things that the researcher is not doing and why she has chosen not to do them; the literature that will not be reviewed; the population(s) that will not be part of the study; and the methodological procedures that will not be used (F. Morin, personal communication, August, 8, 2017).

I interviewed students I had the opportunity to teach in Grades 7 and 8. Since beginning the process of introducing choice and voice in my teaching 7 years ago, I have former students who are currently attending high school and are scattered across Grades 9 through 12. In order to include a range of students in the study, I interviewed 15 students. These students were in Grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. I did not interview students taught by other members of the TELA group as the study is focused on the smaller population of students I was responsible for teaching. I chose not to interview the teachers involved in TELA as I am more concerned with how the approach is impacting students. I am not using quantitative research methods to answer my research question.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are significant. First, there is little published research with which I can compare the results of the proposed study. Second, I only interviewed a selection of my former students, thus, the proposed study is limited to how I delivered the *Choice and Voice* teaching approach in English Language Arts and how this approach worked for a small number of students in my classroom. Third, the proposed study is small in scale: fifteen student participants. Other less significant, but important limitations to mention include issues associated

with time, self-selection, and bias. Former students, particularly those in grade 12 who

completed Grade 8 in June 2013, forgot some of their experiences in my classroom over the

interim of four years and required prompting. Furthermore, students invited to participate in the

proposed study were volunteering, which may have led one or all to answer the interview

questions with the wish or inclination to please me. Since the proposed study is a component of

my Master of Education degree, I designed the study and worked alone in collecting and

coding/interpreting the interview data. How I intend to limit bias is discussed under the heading

"Research Position and Assumptions".

As you will see in the following student profiles (Chapter Four), I interviewed a range of

students from Grades 8-12. A majority of the students are what would be considered

academically "strong", while the minority would fall into the "average" range. I attempted to

reach out to more "below-average" students, but received limited response. The reason expressed

to me was that they did not feel confident being interviewed. Although I would argue this is a

recurrent limitation of qualitative studies, it's possible that these students may not have enjoyed

this approach, or believed they didn't benefit from it. I have found over time that it is difficult, in

both interviews and workshops, if you are faced with students who cannot express themselves

well. You need students who are able to make sense of what is occurring and respond intelligibly

to what is being asked in both research and in workshop presentations.

Based only on my experience as a teacher and TELA member, I believe that the range of

students interviewed represents the range of students in a typical classroom. I have had a number

of teachers visit my classroom and interact with students of all abilities. Many of these visiting

teachers have contacted me for follow-up help: they observed the full range of the students in my

classroom and still recognized the power of the *Choice and Voice* philosophy for all students.

Another limitation is associated with the group of participating Grade 8 students. Their interviews occurred on the last day of school, after report cards had been handed out. With respect to timing, it was not an ideal situation. I found the Grade 8 boys did not speak as much as the other student participants. I believe this was a function of both level of maturity and inclination to reflect given that the school year had just ended.

The focus group meeting occurred during the month of December. It was challenging to make contact with the students who had completed Grade 12 and were either University students writing end of semester examinations or working. There was not an ideal time to bring together fifteen students with very busy schedules. If I had waited until January, all of the high school students would have been writing exams. As a result, I had sixty minutes to bring the students together during a lunch hour. This time limitation restricted discussion of the exit slip question. I made the decision to email students requesting their answers to this final question, but received only five responses.

Research Methodology: Phenomenological Case Study

This phenomenological case study investigates the impact of the *Choice and Voice* teaching approach on students I had taught over six school years (i.e., 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018). I explored whether there is a connection between choice and well-being in terms of agency. Throughout the study I strove to attain an understanding of how students in my classroom made sense of the experiences for themselves. Choice for my students is the phenomenon. As students they are not yet independent; the phenomenon is the dependent relationship of the students and choice.

This qualitative study is based on the belief that "knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience or phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenologists are interested in "lived experience" (Van Manen, 2014, p.26). Since I explored the choice and voiced based experiences of Grade 7 and 8 students that I taught over a 6 year period, it is a phenomenological bounded case study: an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37).

Yin (2014) defines a case study as, "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). As a qualitative case study, I used multiple sources of evidence (interviews, a focus group discussion and student work) in order to gain a more in depth understanding of students' total experiences of this particular program- the *Choice and Voice* based approach. Thus, this phenomenological bounded case study analyses the impact of one particular program on a particular group of learners.

Phenomenology focuses on how an experience is transformed into consciousness (Merriam & Tisdell). Van Manen (2014) explains that phenomenology is "the way of access to the world as we experience it pre-reflectively…(this) is the ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence" (p. 28). Phenomenology of practice refers to the practice of "phenomenological research and writing that reflects on and in practice, and prepares for practice" (van Manen, 2014, p.15). It serves to strengthen one's ontology, epistemology and lead to thoughtful action as "meaning- giving methods for doing inquiry" (van Manen, 2014, p.16). The purpose is to distill individual experiences of a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. The overall interpretation is the researcher's understanding of the participants' understanding of the

phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Overall, I am interested in the meaning my

students have constructed from Reading and Writing Workshop and the student inquiries that

emerged from these workshops.

Research Position and Assumptions

A focused phenomenological study is based on the assumption that there is "an essence

or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood

through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (Patton, 2015 as cited in Merriam & Tisdell,

2016, p. 26). Before conducting individual interviews, it was important that I explore my own

experiences in order to become aware of personal viewpoints and assumptions. This process is

called epoche (or bracketing) "a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment" (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016, p.27). I approached this study with the belief that agency is an important

component of well-being. I believe it is worth studying because we want to increase the well-

being of students and we are looking for a means to do this. My experience throughout the last

five years of teaching was in developing a choice-based approach with the purpose of engaging

my students in becoming lifelong learners. I have implemented this approach and have seen the

positive results in my students' engagement, confidence, and independence.

I explored the impact this choice-based approach has had on my students. As much as

was possible, I put aside my own viewpoints regarding the phenomenon in order to launch the

study free of preconceptions: "to be completely open, receptive, and naive in listening to and

hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated"

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). Memo writing is considered to be an important data collection

strategy when bracketing. It is what the researcher sees, hears, thinks, reflects upon and records

while in the process of gathering data (F.Morin, personal communication, August 8, 2017).

Throughout the interviews I used a journal to record my observations and reflections in order to better understand the students' views, experiences and perspectives. I practiced bracketing by trying to "look with new eyes, like an outsider might" (F.Morin, personal communication, August 8, 2017).

Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research

In this section I present the procedures used to recruit participants for interviews. I describe the process by which consent/assent was ethically obtained, the interviews and focus group meeting. I follow this with a description of the types of data acquired and the source and purpose of each data type. I then describe the transcribing process and how I began to analyze the data using the five core steps that phenomenologists follow throughout data explicitation.

Participant recruitment and sampling. I currently teach a grade 7/8 multi-age class. I have been implementing a choice-based approach for the past 7 years and interviewed students I had taught over the last 6 years. I originally aimed to interview 2 students from each of the following grade levels: 8,9,10,11, and 12. I had planned to select these 10 students based on their final English Language Arts marks in my Grade 8 class: one of these two students would have achieved a 4 (80-100%) and one would have achieved a 2/3 (60-80%). This would have allowed for a slightly randomized, yet diverse selection of students. The criteria for the marking were established by Manitoba Education and Training and align with the Manitoba report card for middle years:

- 4- 80% to 100%: Very good to excellent understanding and application of concepts and skills;

- 3- 70% to 79%: Good understanding and application of concepts and skills; and

- 2- 60% to 69%: Basic understanding and application of concepts and skills.

  (http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/report_cards/docs/eng_my.pdf)

I received more students who were willing to participate in this study than I initially

thought I would be able to interview. Since I had educational leave time from the school division

to conduct the interviews, I decided to allow all students wanting to participate to be interviewed.

Thus, I did not need to group them according to grading categories and then randomly select.

The purpose of the study was to hear from the voices of students. As such, I felt those who

wanted their voices to be heard should have the opportunity to do so.

I received permission from ENREB to conduct this study on April 25th, 2018 (Appendix

E). I began the recruitment process by requesting permission to conduct the study from the

superintendent of the school division, (Appendix F), the principal of the middle school,

(Appendix G), and the principal of the high school, (Appendix H). Upon receiving administrative

consent for the study at the beginning of May 2018, I sent an electronic poster to the high school

principal and requested that he email the poster (Appendix I) in an informational email sent out

to all families. The secretary of the high school asked for the names of the students I had taught

to specifically email only those families. I looked over my class lists and sent her the names of

these students. The parents/guardians of the students I had taught were emailed on May 10th,

2018.

I immediately received responses from several students who had completed Grade 8 with

high marks (3/4's on the Manitoba report card). I was not hearing from students who had

received lower marks (2/3's on the Manitoba report card), and sent a second email to the families

of these students a week later. As I continued to receive little response, I emailed

parents/guardians directly and phoned three students from Grade 11 because I had received no

response from this grade level. I also phoned two students from Grade 9 who received 3's. Although they were interested, they were not comfortable with being interviewed. After a third try of contacting students who had received lower marks, my advisor and I decided to move along with the study and interview the fifteen students who expressed interest in participating.

Informed consent/assent was obtained from the parents and the students involved in the individual interviews, focus group discussion as well from the students whose writing pieces I incorporated as data in the study (Appendix J, K, L, M). I interviewed all fifteen students during the months of May and June 2018. See Appendix N for the interview questions. A thorough description of this process is described in Chapter Four.

Once I generated the themes from the interview data (described in Chapter Four), I invited all fifteen participants to attend a focus group discussion. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to share the themes that arose from my synthesis of the interview data. I emailed all student participants at the beginning of December 2018 to select a date that would work best for all those involved. I sent out reminder emails and received responses from nine of the fifteen students who had been interviewed. We met on December 14th at the high school during the students' lunch hour as that was the time most students were available. Syd Korsunsky (peer reviewer) joined us for this discussion to gain a deeper understanding of the study and to be able to review my interpretations and findings post-interview.

I began the focus group with each student introducing herself/himself. I reminded the students that their responses were being audio-recorded, for which they had given consent. I shared the themes on a PowerPoint, which took approximately 10 minutes. This was followed with a discussion of the themes, open-ended questions discussed by the participants, and an exit slip question (approximately 50 minutes). See Appendix O for the focus group questions. The

students were very open to sharing their ideas, and we ran out of time for the exit slip question. I

provided each student with a paper that outlined the themes discussed and that restated the exit

slip question, and asked each one to email me her/his responses. I also sent an email to all fifteen

students with an attachment describing themes and the exit slip question (Appendix P). Since

some students were unable to make the focus group discussion, I wanted to give them the

opportunity to review the themes and share their thoughts with respect to their experiences with

the *Choice and Voice* approach. This would help support and clarify what I found in the first

round of interviews. I sent two reminder emails regarding the exit slip question and received a

written response from two of the nine students involved in the focus group discussion. Four

interviewed participants who were unable to attend the focus group wrote thorough exit slip

responses.

Data collection/sources. The data sources I used were examples of students' written

work, transcripts of student interviews, transcript of the student focus group discussion and

copies of personal emails with my colleague Syd Korsunsky. These emails represent the history

of the instructional changes that have occurred in the choice/voice program as a result of

students' reflections and my own conversations with Syd and TELA colleagues. I looked for

evidence of the affect of the *Choice/Voice* approach on students' competency, autonomy and

sense of relatedness through their work and what they said through the interviews. The types of

interview questions below allude to the kind of factual and experiential information I aimed to

uncover. In Table 1, I have included the purpose behind each source of data I collected.

Semi-structured interview questions. Participants were asked questions related to their

background, experience, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Responses to the interview

questions led to a description of each individual's experience with the phenomenon under

investigation and provided an understanding of the common experiences of the participants or the universal essence of the phenomenon as described by Merriam & Tisdell (2016).

1. *Background questions:* What grade are you currently in? How many years were you a student in my class?

2. *Choice based learning experiences:* How would you describe your experience in Reading and Writing Workshop? Which inquiry projects did you find the most/least interesting and why? How did your experience learning in and through this project compare to other learning experiences in ELA?

3. *Impact of choice on student well-being/agency:* Of the activities in which you participated, please tell me those that were most meaningful to you and why? How did these activities impact your happiness? Engagement? Relationships? Accomplishment? How did these activities impact your ability to make choices? What did you learn throughout these projects? Did these inquiries take you out into the community to take action? Did they cause you to act differently in the world?

4. *Opinion of the approach:* What are your opinions regarding the choice based approach? *Was it more/less difficult that a more traditional approach? What were the ups/downs of the choice based approach for you?

Table 1

Purpose and Source of Each Type of Data

Types of Data	Purpose	Data sources
Semi Structured Interviews: mix of more and less structured questions that allow for flexibility (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016).	To discover how the students experienced choice, and the impact it had on their wellbeing.	Students' experiences in my classroom (Grades 7 & 8) and beyond (Grades 9 through 12).
Documents of students' personal work and reflections (dated and conditions under which the document was produced)	Student work that reveals where s/he had choice, how s/he demonstrated agency/well-being, and reflected her/his perspective	- Student writing samples - Term reflections that describe a student's experiences/opinions
Personal emails/reflections	Historical account of the choice program (to reveal the impact)	- Personal emails with my mentor Syd Korsunsky - Reflections from students' coursework
Focus group interview: interactive discussion through which data and findings are checked and clarified by participants	Focused group members discussed whether or not the analysis of the data and findings are accurate in light of their personal experiences	- Findings drawn from the data analysis - Interpretations embedded in the findings.

Transcribing. I audio-recorded each interview, listened to all of the interview

recordings and typed out a transcription of each interview. Since there was more interest in

participating in the study, I interviewed more students than anticipated. Transcribing was time

consuming, thus I requested to have a transcriptionist assist in the transcribing of the interviews.

I received approval from ENREB to use a transcriptionist and emailed all parents/students

permission to share interview data with a transcriptionist. Thus, only I, my advisor, peer reviewer

(Syd Korsunsky) and a transcriber had access to the data. The peer reviewer and transcriber both

signed an oath of confidentiality (see Appendix Q & R). All participants agreed to have data

shared with a transcriptionist. I purchased Dragon Professional Individual for Mac, in order to

dictate each interview into a word document. Dictation is accurate and faster than typing directly.

The transcriptionist and I used this software to complete all transcripts.

In areas where I asked follow-up questions or prompted students to remember specific

projects, I indicated such responses using a purple font. For example, I asked questions similar to

the following: "Do you remember…" "When you shared your writing of _____, what you were

thinking?", "How did you feel about your work?" I coded the transcripts to know when I

prompted the students. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I listened again to all of the

recordings and checked that what the transcriptionist and I had typed was accurate. I personally

transcribed 6 interviews (3 hrs, 54 min) and the transcriptionist transcribed 9 (3 hrs, 49 min). I

then emailed each parent of a participant (under the age of 18) or student (18 or older) a copy of

the interview to check it for validity. If students noticed anything that was inaccurate, I asked

them to either email me with corrections or request a second short interview. I stated that if I

didn't hear from them that I would assume the transcript was accurate. I transcribed the 60

minute focus group interview.

Data explication. Data analysis is systematic from narrow units of analysis to broader

units, to detailed descriptions that summarize "what" and "how" the individuals have

experienced the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994 as cited in Creswell, 2013, p.81).

Phenomenologists employ data explicitation throughout the five core steps that follow:

1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction. The research data are approached with an openness to whatever meanings may emerge (Hycner, 1985). As mentioned earlier, the researcher's current understandings have to be bracketed to the best of her ability to allow the phenomenon to speak for "itself" and to be unaltered by preconceptions. The result of this method will be "new meaning, fuller meaning, and renewed meaning" (F. Morin, personal communication, August 8, 2017). I interpreted the meaning of the lived experiences through phenomenological reduction, which is *"*the process of continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure of meaning in and of itself" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). This means I bracketed my own meaning of the experience in order to understand the meaning in what the student was saying, rather than what I expected that student to say.

2) Delineating units of meaning. According to Hycner (1985), an important factor to aid in analysis of interviews is to leave a large margin to the right of the transcription for notes on what the researcher believes are the units of meaning. I went through each interview transcription and highlighted specific meaningful words and phrases. This process is called horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013). I was also careful to "listen to the interview for a sense of the whole," paying careful attention to non-verbal or para-linguistic communications such as words emphasized, the intonations, and pauses. (Hyncer, 1985, p. 281). This is a process of getting at the essence of the meaning expressed without yet addressing the research question to the data (Hyncer, 1985). Once the units of meaning were noted, I was ready to delineate units of meaning relevant to the research question (Hyncer, 1985). It was important that I noted the number of times a unit of relevant meaning was listed, as that indicated its significance.

3) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes. Next, I developed "clusters of

meaning" from these statements and organized them into themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). In

analyzing the data set (interviews, documents, emails), I sought answers to my research question,

which became themes or findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I began by identifying segments in

my data set that were responsive to my questions: this segment was a unit of data, which was a

potential answer to the questions I asked (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a unit must meet two criteria. First, it should be

heuristic in that it reveals information relevant to the study as well as stimulates the reader to

think beyond the information. Second, the unit should stand by itself: "It must be interpretable in

the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in

which the inquiry is carried out" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 345). I compared one unit of

information with the next, and looked for recurring patterns. As I saw patterns emerge, I

compared them with patterns identified in all other interviews. Since more of the researcher's

judgment comes into play here, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend that as a researcher

interviews a participant, she can ask what they think about a theme emerging in the data. I did

this by analyzing the data alongside the data collection process.

4) Summarizing interviews and validating them where necessary. Once I generated the

themes, it was important to return the transcript to the participant for a "validity check" (Hyncer,

1985, p. 291). After discussing if the interview had been accurately and fully "captured," a

second interview could have taken place (p. 292), however it was not necessary in this study. As

I dug deeper into comparing the interview notes a few of the original categories became

subcategories. Once I flushed out the overall categories, I created separate documents, each

labeled with a category name where "each unit of data coded according to this theme is then cut

and put into the full folder" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 209). This beginning process was

inductive, as I came up with tentative categories. As I collected and analyzed more data, I

checked whether the categories held up. Eventually I had set categories in which I was

deductively placing more evidence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Overall, the categories were

"responsive to the purpose of the research" in that they were the answers to my research question

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 212). The categories created met the following criteria outlined by

Merriam & Tisdell (2016): "They are exhaustive (enough categories to encompass all relevant

data), mutually exclusive (a relevant unit of data can be placed in only one category), as sensitive

to the data as possible and conceptually congruent (all categories are at the same level (p. 213).

     *5) **Extracting general and unique themes from interviews and writing a composite***

summary. Once all the above steps were completed, I began to look for common themes

throughout all the interviews and students' writing pieces. This process involved the

"phenomenological viewpoint of eliciting essences as well as the acknowledgement of individual

differences" (Hyncer, 1985, p. 292). Phenomenology ends with a descriptive passage that

discusses the *essence* of the experience for individuals (Creswell, 2014). The lens through which

I interpreted the data is through the theories of the disciplines that my literature review is focused

upon. My understanding of agency for well-being informed how I interpreted the data. The

categories created not only describe the data, but to an extent they also interpret the data. I linked

the categories together in meaningful ways in hopes of developing a model of interrelationships

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As I interpreted the data, I arranged the material into a narrative

account of the findings. The overall data analysis was inductive and comparative in developing

common themes across the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout the study, I had a peer

debriefing with me in order to appear transparent. This individual helped me identify

interpretations that appeared biased.

*"*It is also helpful to be reminded that phenomenological inquiry-writing is based on the

idea that no text is ever perfect, no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is

ever final, no insight is beyond challenge*"* (van Manen, 2011, para. 5). Writing a

phenomenological text is a reflective process of attempting to express the ways we experience

our life and ultimately to be able to act with greater thought (van Manen, 2016). The reader

should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, "I understand better what it is like

for someone to experience that" (Creswell, 2013, p. 62). In the end, this case study was designed

to reveal a "holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit"- the particular

phenomenon of the *Choice and Voice* based approach on students' agency for well-being

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 232).

Credibility, Reliability and Ethics

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is important to consider the credibility,

transferability, dependability and confirmability of a study to ensure trustworthiness. In order to

ensure this credibility, I utilized triangulation. In order to determine whether my interpretations

were effective, I used several data sources: documents of student work, student interviews, focus

groups and emails. I spent as much time as required to engage with the participants while

interviewing them individually and during the focus group.

I also had my mentor and colleague Syd Korsunsky peer review the process and check to

determine if my interpretations were accurate. I needed to manage all my data files, keep them in

order, and track all my data analysis procedures. I did a negative case analysis by continually

refining the study as more and more information became available (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In

order to determine if my interpretations were effective, I did meaning checks by sending the

transcripts back to the participants to check them. I brought all students back together into a

focus group to share what I interpreted so that they could comment on whether the themes I

constructed were accurate.

This study is designed in such a way that when others read the study, they would see how

the findings could transfer to their own context as well. I discussed in detail how I do the

literacy/inquiry approach in my classroom, because I want to increase the level of transferability

of choice in other classrooms. With regards to dependability, this study could be replicated by

any teacher interested in gaining a deeper understanding of how their students' experience a

choice-based approach in relation to well-being.

One last area is a lesser known notion of *catalytic validity*, which "represents the degree

to which the research process reorients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing

reality in order to transform it, a process Friere (1973) terms conscientization" (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). Throughout the interviews, students reflected on their experiences and gained a self-

understanding of how having choice impacts their agency for well-being. The degree to which

my research energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it, in turn

increases the quality of the study by contributing to the consciousness of the participants.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I have ensured that as a researcher I

carried out the study in an *ethical* manner. First of all, I addressed the dual relationship that

exists as a researcher and as a teacher with "power-over" current students. In order for research

to be ethical, consent was given freely, participation was voluntary, and I only included my

current students in the study at the end of the school term when I was no longer in a power-over

relationship with them. In the recruitment and informed consent materials I described the power-

over situation and what would be done to ensure that the Grade 8 participants were not

pressured. In the consent form, I assured all participants that they had the right to personally

withdraw from the study and withdraw their data from the research at any time without

consequences. Moreover, if they had any concerns about their rights or treatment during the

study, I provided the contact information of the authorities they could speak with. I

acknowledged that the researcher was aware that participants may have felt pressure to agree to

their participation because the researcher was in a position of power. I assured participants in the

consent form that their participation or non-participation had no effect on outcomes or on their

relationship with the researcher or other professionals in the setting. I used a neutral tone in the

recruitment and consent materials to reduce pressure to participate. As a result, I refrained from

promoting the potential benefits of the research.

As a researcher, I protected my participants identity and right to privacy. I maintained

confidentiality by informing participants that what they said will remain confidential and not

used against them. In order to protect the identities of participants and the information they

contributed as data, I gave the option to use pseudonyms and exclude student names from

documents. If students wanted to use their names, I received permission to share and make

public this information. I safely and securely stored information that included personal

identification on my password protected personal computer in my home office. As the

researcher, only I, my advisor, my peer reviewer and transcriber had access to the raw data. I

will continue to protect participants' confidentiality after the study is completed.

I was attentive to the relationships between myself and my participants. I was sensitive to

people's social, spiritual, cultural, personal lives and values. I communicated openly with

participants, so that perspectives could be considered and shared with one another. Overall, I

have a good understanding of the policies and expectations related to academic integrity at the

University of Manitoba and have passed the academic integrity tutorial and TCPS 2: Course on

Research Ethics (CORE).

Summary

In this chapter I have presented how I implemented a phenomenological case study

methodology that aims to reveal the impact a choice based promoting practice has on students'

agency for well-being. The self determination theory, capability approach and child right's

perspective are the theories that informed my research method and data analysis. I explored

students' understanding of their experiences in the Reading and Writing Workshops and

inquiries by interviewing fifteen students I taught throughout the last 5 years of implementing

this *Choice and Voice* approach. I also invited the students to a focus group interview to discuss

the themes. Alongside the interviews, I used student work and personal emails with colleagues

who also utilized this method of teaching. I analyzed the data set by creating codes, determining

themes and organizing the categories to interpret. In order to be credible and reliable I used

triangulation, peer reviews, member checking and aimed to make the study transferable for other

teachers.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Data

Choice should be implemented throughout all learning styles, whatever class it's in. I think choice is going to push students to learn what they want to learn and that is going to push them to do better in all aspects. (Kaylyn)

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the results of the recruitment process; the number of students contacted and the number and gender of participants at each grade level. I outline the approximate time of each interview at each grade level and overall. My initial coding is described as well as the methods I used to develop themes from the coding and further organize themes into sub-themes. The data is presented in tables for each theme with students' quotes organized into the sub-themes. Above each table is an explanation of the theme and sub-themes based on excerpts from the interviews. I conclude with a summary of students' responses to the final interview question, "*Do you have anything else that you would like to add to this interview?"*

Participants and Recruitment

Fifteen students from Grades 8 through 12 had parental/guardian consent, or personally gave consent having reached the age of majority, to participate in the study. This involved sharing the work they produced while in Grades 7 and or 8 and being interviewed. Three additional students gave consent to participate in the study by having their work used as research data.

When students complete their middle years education at the end of Grade 8, they typically go to the high school in their catchment area. They can also elect to attend the other high schools in the division, or any number of private schools. The majority of students I taught

chose to continue their high school (grades 9 through 12) education at the nearby high school, while a few students continued at a different school in the division or outside of the division. The eleven high school students interviewed attended the nearby high school, while the four Grade 8 students had just finished their final year at the middle school.

Students I had taught who were registered in Grade 12 during the 2017-2018 school year had the highest number of participants. I was their teacher for Grade 7 and looped up (stayed with them) for their Grade 8 year. Thus, this was the largest group of former students from which to draw potential participants. I taught the Grade 11 students the year that I took over another teacher's Grade 7/8 multi-age class. I only had this group for one year, and half of those in Grade 8 did not continue their education at the nearby high school. Former students in Grades 10, 9, and 8 had been with me when I taught Grade 7/8 multi-age classes, therefore, these students who were invited to participate in the study represented only half their multi-age class (that is 50% of the class would have been in Grade 7). ***Table 2: Participants*** is a breakdown by grade level of the original number of students completing Grade 8 under my tutelage, the number of students contacted, and the number, gender and kind of participant.

Table 2

Student Participants

	Original # of Gr.8 students in class	Students Contacted	Number and Gender of Participants for Interview and for using their work	Number and Gender of Participants for using work only
Grade 12	26	17	3 female, 2 male	1 male
Grade 11	11	4	1 female	
Grade 10	10	9	2 female, 1 male	1 male
Grade 9	10	7	2 female	
Grade 8	10	10	2 female, 2 male	1 male
Overall	67	47	10 female, 5 male= 15 total	3 male

Student Profiles. The following are profiles of each participating student to showcase their backstories. The profiles are arranged by the grade level of the student when the one-on-one interview took place and include the grades in which I was the student's teacher. It should be noted that many of the students in the study took their passion further and co-presented with me at a number of different professional development workshops. I represent this co-presentation with the insertion of an asterisk before the student's name.

Interviewed while in Grade 12.

Rhiannon: Taught in Grades 6, 7, and 8. Rhiannon made strides over the course of three years. At first, she struggled and wasn't a strong student. She had difficulty working independently. As a result, she was slow to embrace the challenges. With support and choice she found her creative strengths and excelled.

*Kaylyn: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Kaylyn transformed from a shy student to a natural leader. She gained confidence as she found her passion and her voice. She excelled in her inquiry projects and created notable work on "Conspiracy Theories" and the brain of serial killers. She became very active in student voice groups.

*Jon: Taught in Grade 8. Jon's perspective on learning changed dramatically in Grade 8. He entered the class not enjoying school, but the *Choice and Voice* approach resonated with him. His attitude towards school changed as he became engaged in his projects.

*Jeff: Taught in Grades 6, 7, and 8. Jeff was never afraid of a challenge. Outspoken and energetic, he wanted a change after his first two years in the same class. But after reflecting on having choice and voice in his learning, he decided to challenge himself further in Grade 8 and stayed for a third year. He became a strong critical thinker and leader, and he never regretted his decision.

*Sarah: Taught in Grades 6, 7, and 8. Sarah is dedicated to learning; never letting obstacles get in the way. She lives with dystonia, bound to a wheelchair, and types with her toes. She was only able to attend part time in Grade 7 due to the pain with which she was dealing. Even so, she kept up with her work via email and teacher visits at home. Not only did Sarah graduate on time, she also won scholarships and became valedictorian.

Interviewed while in Grade 11.

Rhya**:** Taught in Grade 8. Rhya was a quiet student who eventually found her voice through reading and writing. She embraced the inquiry projects, especially learning about residential schools. She also gained confidence throughout her interview project with a neurosurgeon.

Interviewed while in Grade 10.

Nicole: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Nicole was a strong student, highly opinionated, and resistant to being told what to do. Her strong personality occasionally made her less open to feedback. However, over time she became more accepting and emerged as a positive influence in the classroom. She discovered her voice in Grade 8, and is currently a strong advocate for writing with choice.

*Alika: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Alika went from being a shy student to a strong leader who enjoyed debating issues in class. She became our class "poet laureate". Not only did she find a love for poetry, as an extension to an inquiry project she wrote her own novel about a character living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

*Brady: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. For Brady, the freedom to express himself through writing projects allowed him to display his incredibly creative mind. He became an outspoken

advocate for the *Choice and Voice* approach sharing his innovative inquiries and interview

projects.

  Interviewed while in Grade 9:

  *Atavia: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. With her diverse range of interests, the *Choice and Voice* approach was a perfect fit for Atavia's learning style. At first she required support keeping her many ideas organized. Over time, she gained independence and found her voice.

  *Karley: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Karley is an inspiration for this research study. Among her many achievements, she wrote an impassioned letter to the school division board office arguing for more choice in students' learning. Between Grade 7 and Grade 8, she designed her own inquiry project during the summer and corresponded with us, even as she was dealing with severe medical issues. She consistently possessed above average skill, but worked hard to go above and beyond. She has been a strong advocate for the student choice philosophy at a number of in-service presentations.

  Interviewed while in Grade 8

  Aya: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Aya is an EAL student who came to Canada from Syria. She started out with a communication barrier, but stated a number of times how being able to share her journey so that students could know more about her was very important to her. Her English improved dramatically as she was fully included in all the reading and writing exercises.

  *Mitzi: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Mitzi grew up in the Philippines as a strong independent student, and came to Canada in elementary school. She initially struggled with the *Choice and Voice* approach, but found that the writing exercises gave her the tools she needed to develop confidence in her abilities. She found her voice in writing poetry, which she says had a

huge impact on her well-being. She speaks passionately to teachers and students about having choice and voice.

Hayden: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Hayden is a high energy, outspoken student who loves to debate. He was initially resistant to suggestions about his work. Eventually he opened up, becoming more willing to listen and respond to feedback. He explored an eclectic range of topics, from an inquiry on time travel and an issue piece on the cosmetic industry, to a variety of poems relating to critical world issues.

Riley: Taught in Grades 7 and 8. Riley was a quiet student who struggled to express himself in Grade 7, beginning the year as a below average performing student. As he became more accepting of feedback and willing to practice the writing exercises, his understanding and effort improved greatly in Grade 8. He found his strength in writing fiction, becoming one of the strongest writers in the classroom of that genre.

Recruitment. Once the initial communication with families and students had been established, I contacted the parents/guardians of students who expressed an interest in participating in the study. Originally, I was going to group the students according to their final mark and then randomly select from the two categories as described in Chapter Three. However, I decided to interview all students who wanted to participate. My rationale for this decision was outlined in Chapter Three.

I delivered the consent forms (Appendix J & L) and assent forms (Appendix K & M) to the office at the high school. The secretary called the interested students to the office to pick up the forms to take home, read and sign. Participants were contacted via email for a one-on-one interview with me at a time and place convenient for both the student and me. Participants returned the signed consent and assent forms to me when we met for the interview.

As a grade 7/8 multi-age teacher, I recognized that I was in a position of power over the Grade 8 students who were invited and chose to participate in the study. In order to alleviate any pressure, the Grade 8 students may have felt to participate, I asked for consent after final marks were submitted and accepted by my administration on June 20th, 2018. Upon receiving administrative consent for the study, I sent an electronic poster (Appendix I) in an informational email to all ten Grade 8 families. Parents and the Grade 8 students, therefore, decided about consenting/assenting knowing that their decision would not have an effect on their end of year evaluation or treatment in class. I received emails from four families who wanted to participate in the study. Letters of consent/assent were distributed to these families and interviews were arranged via email. Since I had decided to interview all interested students, I did not randomly select from these 4 students. I arranged the one-on-one interviews to take place after report cards had been handed out on the day before the school year ended. Interviews took place in the Student Services room at the middle school.

After the invitational poster was sent out, students who were interested in only sharing their work with me had their parents/guardians email me. I received emails from 3 students who were interested in sharing only their work (see Table 2: Participants). I sent a consent form (Appendix J) to the student's parent/guardian and an assent form to the student (Appendix K) whose writing I would like to incorporate as data in the study. The following Table 3: Interview Schedule and Duration is the time of interviews at each grade level and the overall time each interview took.

Table 3

Interview Schedule and Duration

	Schedule of Interviews May/June 2018	Duration of Interviews
Grade 12	Sarah May 21st at 4:00 PM *** Rhiannon May 23rd at 10:04 AM Kaylyn May 23rd at 12:58 PM ** Jon May 23rd at 11:50 AM ** Jeff May 25th at 4:09 PM	1 hour and 5 minutes 53 minutes 27 minutes 28 minutes 43 minutes *= 3 hours and 36 minutes*
Grade 11	Rhya June 14th at 3:46 PM **	*= 18 minutes*
Grade 10	Nicole May 31st at 10:07 AM * Alika June 14th at 12:31 PM * Brady June 14th at 1:23 PM *	18 minutes 27 minutes 23 minutes *= 1 hour and 8 minutes*
Grade 9	Atavia May 31st at 12:44 PM * Karley May 31st 11:44 AM ***	43 minutes 37 minutes *= 1 hour 20 minutes*
Grade 8	Aya June 28th at 2:28 PM *** Mitzi June 28th at 2:04 PM ** Hayden June 28th at 1:07 PM * Riley June 28th at 1:28 PM ***	18 minutes 28 minutes 16 minutes 19 minutes *= 1 hour and 21 minutes*
Overall Time		7 hours and 43 minutes

NOTE: Participated in the focus group *; Completed the exit slip but didn't participate in the focus group **; Participated in the focus group and completed the exit slip ***

Coding and Theme Development

Once the interviews were transcribed (see description in Chapter Three), I began looking

at this data to determine the connection, if any, between the *Choice and Voice* approach and

students' agency for well-being. I have defined agency for well-being as showing competence,

autonomy and relatedness to others. I began openly coding by highlighting excerpts from the

interviews that revealed where students had choice, how they demonstrated agency for well-

being (competence, autonomy and relatedness) and their perspectives on the *Choice and Voice*

based approach. I made comments in the right-hand margin of each transcription where there

was data that could be used to answer the research question: How does a choice and voice

approach in Reading and Writing Workshop instruction impact Middle Year's students' agency

for well-being? I also marked any word or phrase that linked to my research question.

The formation of categories was both inductive and deductive. I began with bits of data

that seemed to fit together. This was the inductive process that occurred as I immersed myself in

the interviews and transcriptions. I was also thinking deductively. I came into the study guided

by the self-determination theory that argues that competence, autonomy and relatedness are the

basis for self-motivation and overall personal well-being. I began looking for evidence of

competence, autonomy and relatedness in what the students said in the transcribed interviews

and in their written work.

After working through each transcript, I began grouping comments and notes that shared

similarities. This initial phase was inductive as I began to see tentative categories. I created a

document with a list of these categories, and as I moved onto a different transcript, I kept in mind

the list of categories I had created and checked to see whether they were present in the transcript

I was reading, or if new themes were emerging. Comparing one set of data with another to

determine similarities and differences (constant comparative method), allowed me to determine

the main themes (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). After openly coding all the transcripts, I created a

list of five core recurring themes. Within each theme, I noted sub-themes.

I cut and pasted the most powerful quotes from each student under each of the five major

themes. From there I created a large table in which I began organizing the quotes into the sub-

themes under each of these 5 major themes. I began to notice key words and more sub-themes as

I did this, and decided the best way to show each theme was to create a document for each theme

with a table to display the major theme, sub-themes and quotes. As I moved through the pieces

of writing collected from participating students, I was able to deductively sort written work

samples into these categories. Once I had read all data associated with the study, I reached a

point where no new information presented itself.

The five themes from my coding that appeared in all five grade levels (8 through 12) are

as follows: relatedness, autonomy, competence, engagement/enjoyment and agency. Within each

of these themes are sub-themes. The following is a bulleted list of the themes with their

associated sub-themes:

- relatedness (connected to self, connected to others)

- autonomy (beginning towards independence, developing independence [with choice, critical

   thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication]

- competence (direct instruction, feedback)

- engagement, enjoyment

- agency (thinking differently, taking action).

Presentation of Data

In the fifteen pages that follow the five major themes are described in succession. After

each description of a theme, the associated sub-themes are presented in a table. Each identified

sub-theme is explained in greater detail using one or more excerpts from the interviews.

Relatedness. As originally described, relatedness is the feeling that one is close and

connected to others (Reis et al., 2000). The following table displays aspects, or sub-themes, of

relatedness: relating through books, connecting with others through sharing, helping/trusting

each other, and building a sense of community. In reading through the interviews with

participating students, I added a second component to the definition of relatedness:

relating/connecting to self. Students had opportunities, through choice, to learn about a variety of

topics that were of personal interest to them. In such a learning environment, they became more

comfortable in the classroom and opened up to others in the class. As one example from Alika

shows, learning about mental health issues and electing to write about a specific mental health

topic of interest to her was meaningful in facilitating a greater awareness of her private self and

her ability to relate to others.

> The book that me and Lara wrote was probably one of the most important ones, because
>
> I personally have OCD [obsessive-compulsive disorder]. So that let me learn a little bit
>
> more about what I have. OCD can lead into having anxiety and having depression… It
>
> definitely helped us understand just mental issues in general, and it gave both of us a lot
>
> more awareness towards it. Now I can understand when other people are, like, having an
>
> anxiety attack. I can know what's happening. (Alika)

The students took their writing very seriously. They often made the distinction between

the kind of assignments that were handed in, graded and discarded, and assignments that had a

real sense of purpose. There was purpose in sharing work with others. Sarah describes it best

when she says, *"*It's worth it, because other people heard it. It doesn't just go to the teacher, get

handed back and then go into the garbage. It's not like that. There is a reason for it. I think it

gave purpose. I liked that aspect of the class." There was a sense that their writing could have a

real impact on others and make a difference.

When books were shared, students were often able to relate to each other through their

book preferences. However, the main way that students connected with each other was through

each other's writing. Sharing their own writing made them feel more accepted and part of the

classroom community. In other cases, by reading or hearing other students' writing, they all got

to know each other on a more personal level and gain a deeper understanding of the lives of

others. This fostered connections, a greater sense of community and empathy. Through that sense

of community, students opened up and gained trust with each other. As a result of this trust, they

felt comfortable helping one another with their writing.

Aspects of Relatedness	Relatedness Quotes
Connecting to self	"Learning more about things that I could possibly have [anxiety/depression] helped me be more comfortable with telling people about it. A lot of the stuff we did, actually helped me through things in my own life. So like, the poems and stuff like that actually helped, and it helped get a lot of feelings out." Atavia "I think that writing our more personal things…You can put your soul into it. It makes the writing seem like it's alive." Brady
Relating through books	"I like it [reading] more now because I got recommendations from other people. So I connected with other people through books." Mitzi Ponce
Connecting with others through sharing	"The first year I did not like to talk in the class and if people want to know me, they could just read the story. Like, if I can read people's story, I can know more. Like, when I wrote my story 'Jordan to Canada' (see Appendix S). I think they can know my story, how I move, how I did that." *So people can connect to you?* "Yeah. And I can connect to other people." Aya *Sharing personal writing,* "That helped me feel more included as a group and more connected with everybody in the class so that was a big thing too." Jon "When I'm reading another person's writing piece, I not only get to know them emotionally, but how they are as a person." Mitzi "I think that the poetry that we shared with each other, we really got to know each other and know how we write and you can kind of like feel the soul of the writer in poetry." Brady *Sharing work with classmates*, "[You] see each other's skills and weaknesses it was like an eye-opener, and it helped being able to put myself in other people's shoes and knowing what's reasonable." Jeff

| Helping/ Trusting | "When you are reading someone else's work, or you're going over it to like help other people, you feel more connected with them because it's like a lot of things that you write down, you can't say out loud." Karley

"[It's] having a sense of companionship with peers, it makes them more united in a way. You can actually relate to their work or help them out in a way." Rhya

"To show your work to someone else in this way, you have to be completely trustworthy of them because like people are sharing some pretty serious stuff sometimes." Karley |
|---|---|
| Sense of Community/ Family | *Sense of community.* "You built that in your classroom and that's what gave us the opportunity to then share more because it wasn't awkward." Sarah

"I think it also made our class more like a family almost, how we all cared about each other, because we all knew each other's certain stories…we knew stuff about each other that other people wouldn't." Atavia

"I shared all the time and that connected me to learning what other people were learning and how interesting that was." Kaylyn

"Being in class that I enjoyed and I just was respectful and was nice because I enjoyed being there, that helped me outside, meaning that now in the outside world I feel like I'm respectful and nice to everybody." Jon |

Autonomy. Autonomy involves perceiving that one's activities are self-directed. In light of what the students said, I noticed a gradual move towards independence and have categorized sub-themes as being part of becoming autonomous. The initial phase consists of being given opportunities for independence. Students then became more comfortable in making choices and gained skills in critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration. With these skills they moved into becoming more independent inside and then outside of school.

At first I was like 'come on we actually have to think now?' (Jon)

In the beginning when students were given more autonomy, many were not used to thinking on their own. Many commented that it was difficult at first, as they had been used to being told what to do in a more structured environment.

I think my first year was more difficult, because I was so fixated on wanting to do what the teacher wanted me to do and getting the grades that way instead of more actually furthering my learning with what I thought would be more important to me. (Alika)

With guidance in imagining, conceptualizing, and appraising topics, and through discussions and modeling, students became more comfortable in making choices. In identifying and building upon their own interests, they revealed a greater care and sense of ownership in their work. Students gained in independence when they did not feel forced to learn about certain topics. They began to learn more about themselves, their interests and felt a sense of maturity in being able to make their own decisions. Their comments focused on learning how to think more critically and creatively, improving their communication skills, and collaborating with others. Ultimately students noted that their confidence had actually grown through having choice, freedom and independence.

But this totally just blew my mind, like, 'Oh my gosh, I can totally do this! I can do this independently!' I got used to being so structured, but now here I am, just making up my own choices. (Mitzi)

As students learned these skills, they became less reliant on teacher guidance and more independent in directing their own learning inside and outside of school.

If I need to write a story in the summer, I know how to do it. I know I can do draft zero. I can write off the page... I never write the story before, just in your class. That was the first time I write the story. (Aya)

Through a gradual move towards greater autonomy and responsibility, students gained

independence in making personal life choices.

In your class I got to decide my direction of what I wanted to learn. So, beyond that when

I do get choice, I still decide what I want to learn. (Kaylyn)

Aspects of Autonomy	Autonomy
Initial response to autonomy	"It's more difficult at first because you have to make the students comfortable, you have to start it slower but once you get into that motion and feel comfortable, once you have that choice it's way easier to learn and do your work because you're excited about it." Kaylyn "In the beginning I was a little concerned, like I wasn't sure I was going to be able to keep up with this. I thought I had maybe a bad imagination or bad creativity side. We started going through the ropes and I started being good at it and I was surprised." Jeff
Choice/ Interests	"Whole choice thing being able to pick what you want made me succeed more independently than having other people help me or having other people push me to do it." Jon "You gave us the opportunity to choose. You gave us this list of things that we can choose, and also I chose transgender and I learned a lot about that." Rhiannon
Self-direction	*Improving independence:* "Like, if you're doing your own thing and everybody works at their own pace instead." Hayden "It allowed me to put my ideas down freely". Riley "[The workshops] gave us all the tools to know what we had to do on our own." Rhya
Learning 4 C's (creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking)	"You definitely gain a very strong independence, because you are thinking more, you are creating your own… That's something that you definitely pushed: 'We want to hear your thoughts there's no right or wrong answer'." Rhiannon "I learned how to communicate my thoughts in a way that people can understand, because the way that I think I'm not always clear. Like, sometimes I forget that some people don't live in my mind." Rhiannon "If you guide them the right way I think giving kids the choice, giving

	me the choice made me a lot more of a responsible thinker. It put a reasoning behind most of my thoughts." Jeff "I think it like takes in a lot more appreciation for the thinking of the student rather than the final copy and how nice it looks." Jeff
Maturity and confidence	*Believes it is a good way to teach people to be more mature:* "It really brought out my thoughts and I showed people how I really am as a person." Mitzi "I did my projects individually and that allowed me to grow within myself so that I had more confidence to connect with others, if that makes sense." Kaylyn "It definitely made me feel more mature, therefore, I felt confident in myself to make decisions on my own compared to before not as much." Jeff
Independence beyond school	"When I write, it calms me down because it's one of those techniques where I can just go home and write. Choice learning gives you all these different techniques that you don't have to only use inside the classroom, but you can also use outside in your free time, like when you are trying to get a job. It just gives you all these different ways of doing things in your life." Karley "We were going off and learning new things and then coming back and teaching everyone else new things and it definitely really helps. When it comes to going out into the world, because we are now able to just go off on random topics." Alika "Definitely having to make choices puts a lot more pressure on yourself, but it makes it a lot more personal. Making choices in your class helped me pick stuff that I wanted to do now." Jon

Competence. Competence is gained by one's ability to do something effectively. The key aspects in developing competence amongst the participating students were receiving choice, feedback and direct instruction. In turn, students gained confidence and felt more competent in their learning in school and outside of school. Students began to feel competent as they became more comfortable with themselves, sharing their ideas and writing with each other. Communication helped them feel successful as they shared with each other and realized the

commonalities their stories expressed. In sharing their work with others, they felt a sense of accomplishment.

> You do have a choice, but if you just give this big choice to a student, they'll be there and be like, 'Well, I have the choice, but can't think of anything to do with it.' Where if you have all these extra exercises to use at the back of your head, it's like a structure, but you don't have to follow it exactly, but it's at the back of your mind to help you. (Karley)

In practicing the exercises and the specific craft of writing in class, students gained independence and felt more competent in their ability to do their work effectively. Throughout inquiry projects they learned how to research and synthesize information to create something new.

Choice and directed meaningful feedback would motivate students to care and write more, which in turn led them to develop a greater work ethic. They learned how to make improvements and took the time to revise as they worked on pieces for which they had a deeper personal understanding. In one of Alika's poems ("Always a But," Appendix T), she reflected on this process:

> I now know that every time
> I'm corrected
> It's because where I see a mistake
>
> They see potential.

Students discussed feeling a "boost of confidence" as they received feedback and shared their work. This sense of competency continued into the future as students commented on their ability to "learn beyond learning", "think about both sides" in a debate, and communicate with others while pursuing their goals.

Aspects of Competence	Competence
Feedback	"The feedback to my pieces, it makes you feel good because it's actually your work and you created it, you weren't forced to do it, it's all you." Karley "You're getting this great feedback but like let's work on this, you'll be like, 'okay I can be better I can improve myself even more'." Rhiannon "Just that whole positive spin on everything really helps us succeed in your class for sure." Jon
Direct instruction (craft of writing, research skills & synthesis)	"I think the work ethic that we learned… I learned how to actually research. The most important thing I learned is that learning is not about asking questions and finding answers. It's about asking questions and finding answers but deriving more questions from the answer. It stuck with me. I learned to think more critically about things." Brady "You literally have to take all of what you know and make something new out of it in a way that it makes sense. In my experience, that actually makes you understand it and remember it, rather than copy and pasting it, reading out loud once, and then it just goes to the back of your mind forever and it's done with." Karley "When Mr. K showed us how to insert the critical pieces and information but like along with the story it was like a game changer." Jeff "All my writing before I was creative in my head and I could write it on paper but I didn't know how to structure it." Jon
Caring and confident	"We started [speaking] in sharing circles. That was always a safe environment to talk in and that brought me out to not be afraid to just stand in front of the class." Kaylyn "Just being able to share those with others really is what makes me feel successful, like, 'You know what Mitzi, you did it!' And publishing it too." Mitzi "I could do a lot more than I thought I could. I think that my self-confidence was boosted in a way. Like I was more open." Atavia
Competent in learning beyond	"I realized that with the creativity that I already had, and like what I could do, I could use those skills and transfer them into other things that helped. The fact that I can still learn beyond learning is really good too." Atavia "It definitely helped be able to speak about what I wanted to talk about, because we've had debates in my classes where I've now been able to think

	about both sides." Alika
	"We also did write about ourselves quite a bit in your class as well. So I knew how to portray a life situation on the paper. It was so cool because I ended up sending it in and it ended up in McLeans magazine." Sarah
	"I just found it really helpful to know how to write these different things, because now if someone approaches me whether in school or out of school, I just know that, like, great I've been taught how to write this way. It does help me communicate with other agencies and foundations." Sarah

Engagement/Enjoyment.

Since we had a choice to write about what we cared about, I wanted to work at it, and so I worked hard. It's like two birds with one stone, I guess. You're both working hard at it and working on something you really like. Very rewarding. (Brady)

In providing students with choice and voice in their learning, the three needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy are fulfilled. Engagement/enjoyment are a product of having these needs met, all of which appear to be essential for personal well-being. The specific aspects of engagement and enjoyment that the students discussed were having choices, learning new information, feeling motivated and passionate, relating to their work, and putting in an effort.

If you don't put something that they love in the equation they're not going to learn.

(Rhiannon)

Students found enjoyment in having their choices and voices heard, they cared more about their work and became more engaged. In this state, learning became more reflective as they asked why/how questions, delved into their own research inquiries and felt a sense of purpose in having others read their work. In Gabe's science diabetes inquiry, he read a novel, interviewed his dietician and wove his research into a journal of how he copes with living with

diabetes. Gabe chose a topic that was personally impacting him. Similarly, he carried out an inquiry on stress and anxiety, created a character and presented his research in a journal. The following is an excerpt with Gabe's highlighting of where he embedded his research:

> I've been meditating every morning and I feel like It's gotten a bit better but I still have barely any energy. I am barely able to stay awake when I read and I nearly pass out while at hockey practice. Also, I'm starting to get really worried because exams are next week. I went back to the doctor yesterday and my blood pressure is still really high. I'm going to a therapist later this week to hopefully get me through this. My parents have also made me read about serious causes of stress like blood clots and heart attacks it's really scary stuff. I just wish I wasn't worried about everything in my life it would be so much easier. Like I said earlier though I am going to a Cognitive behavioral therapist doesn't that sound fun? Apparently it is a popular and effective method used to manage anxiety. This type of therapy teaches me to recognize anxious thoughts and behaviors and change them into more positive ones. At least that's what it says in the brochure. Hopefully it's true...

Mental health issues were popular inquiry topics amongst students as they impact many teenagers. Tyler chose to research depression for one of his projects. His big question was "How does a serious illness change someone's way of living both physically and emotionally?" Tyler's research led him to write a story in which he created a character experiencing depression (see Appendix U). Throughout these projects, students became motivated to have their own viewpoints/research heard and worked hard at delivering their message in meaningful ways.

> You guys made me a better student, if that makes more sense. I was more passionate about it, more wanting to get a better education. (Jon)

Relating to your work is important for understanding and engagement. Students

commented on personally connecting to their work and feeling excited to learn. In addition, they

were learning from their peers who were also excited to learn. Their eagerness to learn about

their interests led to an increased work effort as they enjoyed what they were doing.

I was engaged because when I was learning or researching myself. I was excited for what

I was doing. When I was hearing other people talk, I was just as engaged because they

were excited about what they were doing. (Kaylyn)

Aspects of Engagement/ Enjoyment	Engagement/ Enjoyment
Choice and voice	"I usually really liked writing and cared about the things we talked about a lot. So I was usually very involved, which has actually made me more involved in my other classes. I was like, 'Oh, I have choice now. I can speak and not be told that I'm wrong.' Unless we're ignorant." Atavia "Having choice and being able to write the way you want made it a lot more fun and made us want to do it more." Jon "Sometimes in Syria, how about if I don't like the topic? Like, in the class here we can choose what we want to write, I can enjoy what I'm writing." Aya "When he gave other students the choice, they were just so much more engaged, and they chose to do it better without even having to force them to do it they exceeded expectations." Jeff
Engaging in the learning process	"You encourage us to ask how and why questions, and that encourages me to dig deeper too, but then I can't stop when I research!" Mitzi "[You're] not telling me what to do, but HOW to do it. Now let's engage in that, because now I will go home and have the freedom to do what I'd like to do based on what you taught me. Instead of teaching me what we're going to do and expecting me to just love it and go along with it, which is what many teachers do, you led us to the finish line, but didn't push us over the line." Sarah "Well since they [projects] are all more independent, I kind of learned how to do time management and stuff like that, and like my organization. I guess I learned about the topics. I didn't know about carrots and time travel.

	And also, I learned how to write better so that it's more engaging for people to read." Hayden "Everyone is doing their own inquiry, but in the end, if we all share all these things, it's like your brain is flying with information. Like your teacher could not teach all that in like a day, So you're learning all this, it's just in a different way." Karley
Motivated/ Passionate	Students were motivated to work hard to get their message [accurately] across to their audience – "to make sure they understood." Atavia "But I actually got to go in depth on a topic I was passionate about and that I actually cared about." Nicole "I really like the one where we could choose our own topic to think about [artificial intelligence] because it gave us an inspiration to keep on working on that thing because it's something you're interested about and you care about so you just want to work at it more because you like working at it." Brady
Relating to work = being attentive	"In your class we got to relate to what we are writing about and I just don't get to relate to what I'm learning anymore." Kaylyn. "Students won't be as engaged if they can't relate to the work as much. Everyone is different, so choice can help people excel in their own way." Rhya "When it actually came down to the work that we were doing, they'd actually pay more attention I feel, because they were connected to it." Karley "I want to learn in a different way that's going to be more personal that's going to make me want to learn. I definitely lost the spark that I had from Grade 8. It's not so much sad, it's the truth" Rhiannon
Effort/ Enjoyment	"I always did my work as hard as I could, but now I enjoy doing it more if that makes sense. So I want to do it." Jon "Because I enjoyed it and put more effort in, it was like my work became better for it, and I became smarter because of it." Karley "I was interested in [the projects], if I like learning about it, I'm going to remember. Things you don't like you usually block out. Things that were boring or weren't interesting or more forced upon you, you're not going to like." Kaylyn.

   Agency. For the purpose of this study, the term "agency for well-being" means the ability

to show competence, autonomy and relatedness, which in turn leads to enhanced personal well-

being (engagement/enjoyment) and a desire to take meaningful action in one's life and

community.

   I think talking about agencies for well-being knowing that what you taught us affected our

   lives, that's one of the big things for me. (Sarah)

   Students developed open mindedness and empathy towards others. In one of the writing

pieces Nicole shared the following: "Four stories, about four people who have made me see the

world through a different set of eyes." Her piece demonstrates how relatedness can lead to

greater empathy and understanding for people living with disabilities ("Different Set of Eyes,"

Appendix V). Not only did students open up in their writing, for some gaining empathy led to

taking social action in the community and using their knowledge for the benefit of others by

visiting classrooms and doing workshops.

   I think my learning was very closed before. I learned so much more, and I opened up

   more to people because we were taught about that. (Atavia)

   Students discussed how Reading/Writing Workshop and the inquiry projects caused them

to think and act differently in the world. One inquiry that was noted to have a major impact was

focused on homelessness. In Karley's inquiry she interviewed a worker at McDonald Youth

Centre, researched a variety of shelters and created a character who experiences homelessness

due to a variety of mental health issues (see Appendix W). Students commented on how this

project made them become more aware of issues impacting people in society, how they became

less judgmental and more open minded. In future independent inquiry projects, students often

chose mental health issues they wondered about. They commented on gaining a deeper understanding, respect and empathy towards others.

When asked if any of the inquiries took them out into the community to take action, students commented on helping out in the community and becoming involved in student voice groups. It also helped the students define future career plans. Students discussed reaching out, advocating for themselves and others. A small group of the participants visited other classrooms to share the *Choice and Voice* approach with other teachers and students. One student, Sarah, became her own agent for change as she became more comfortable speaking to her classmates and teachers. She wanted to make a larger impact as she spoke out on behalf of people living with disabilities. Sarah explains:

> My experience in your class is what actually fueled my willingness and I guess my idea of trying to reach out**.** This message that I'm talking about goes beyond me, you have to think about the larger scale. Next time you meet someone else with a disability think about what I said, think about don't underestimate these people.

Some students expressed their agency in the community, some in the classroom and some in wanting to change the education system itself. Many students spoke of changes they would like to see in high school. Over the past 5 years, many of the students who were interviewed have had the opportunity to participate or even lead conferences and workshops. This experience and others have resulted in the creation of perspectives of what should happen in the education system. Karley, as one example, took it to the next level and spoke to administrators and decision makers.

> I feel like the teachers themselves, for you to be able to say, 'Yes I want to do this,' is such a big change, but you can take little steps to get to this place. I think teachers may

say it's more, but students are going to go further, so like why not? You want your

students to succeed, so to me this is the better way to do it. (Karley)

Aspects of Agency	Agency
Open mindedness	"I also interviewed my cousin who has autism and I learned definitely a lot and it opened my mind." Rhiannon The inquiry projects, not just the climate change project, opened up my mind and it made me interested in learning more." Mitzi "I was more open minded, now that I knew about it. I thought more, before I judged someone or like saw someone on the street, I didn't just think 'oh you're just lazy or something'. I knew more about it." Nicole "It definitely makes me more aware and more careful with things you say around people, and it kind of just helps with social interactions" Alika. "I think a lot of the stereotypes about certain things, and I think those were kind of cleared when I learned more stuff about them, so it extended my knowledge further." Atavia
Empathy	"For the homelessness inquiry, we got to experience it ourselves and think about it in a way that we could understand it." Karley "In general having those experiences makes you more open. With decision-making I would just be more thoughtful of a person I guess. In general, I would be able to have more empathy or belief." Rhya "I definitely feel a lot more empathy. [On topics like] mental health, like the homelessness." Brady "I would say the autism project just because it has a personal connection. I have a lot of friends who have extraordinary needs. Empathy was a big thing that I learned in your class." Rhiannon "When you learn about something so intensely that interests you, you can build upon other things. Like the gender identity thing, I can build upon that in terms of [understanding] anxiety and depression." Rhiannon "Honestly a lot after middle school running through my head, I would think how do they feel, it definitely helped me become more of a conscious person more sensitive to people's feelings." Jeff

Taking action in the community/ Career involvement	"When we visited Siloam Mission I actually wanted to do my own volunteering too. Since we have so many clothes in the house, we actually have a rule that before we buy anything we have to give up or donate our stuff first." Mitzi. "I interviewed the judge and that was an amazing experience and that pushed me into civic engagement. It kind of brought me into what I like to do and what I like to be involved in." Kaylyn "I feel a lot of the stuff we learned helped us become better people, because we did learn about climate change. It also helped me become more interested in botany, and I want to become a botanist now." Atavia
Visiting classrooms/ Workshops	"I would go to different classrooms and conferences to try to show exactly what I was learning, and how I was enjoying and how like you can do it yourself to enjoy school better." Karley "That student to student relationship I think is very special, because as you're looking up to a teacher… it's kind of scary to tell them the truth… But when you're talking to a student, I feel like you're on the same level, you're on the same playing field, so it's easier to do that." Karley
Having a voice/ Reaching out.	"I did the Rick Hansen speech at my high school last year and after I did my speech one of the EA's that works with another girl who doesn't speak, her disabilities are little more severe than mine. The EA said, you do realize that it made an impact in that other students are now opening the door for her in a wheelchair and students are more aware that she is here; that she exists." Sarah "It allowed me to find my voice and now in high school I love to talk and present all the time, there is no issue with me talking in front of anyone." Kaylyn [involved in SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco), spoke to the school board and worked as a page at the legislative assembly] "I can write about it and if that changes one person's perspective on things that can change other people's perspective on things." Atavia
Highschool	"I don't like high school English…like, all we do is write essays. Whereas in middle school we can have a choice. We could write an essay, we could make a persuasive essay, write a short story or narrative. And I think high school teachers should realize it is not only one way to get your point across. Like, the five-paragraph essay, it's a very caged approach, it's very cookie-cutter." Brady "Being able to embed critical information about the facts that you learned

	into like something creative is important but like it's not that useful in high school because we get asked to do like a book report." Jeff
Advice for teachers/students	"Some students that just want to pass the course and move on and I feel like those are the students that may not like that type. Because you really do have to learn something and it's not a free pass-by." Sarah "It would be beneficial for a lot more teachers to give kids more choice in what they want to write about, because I think it just helps kids be able to feel more comfortable in school and what they're learning." Alika "But when you're in middle school and the average middle schooler is thinking, 'Well I can't fail this grade,' I think the most important thing is to make sure your students are liking what they're doing and feeling into it." Jeff "I'm glad I was in Ms. Hall's class, I'm glad I did all these things even if it was hard in the moment. Like it's hard for kids to see the future and the bigger picture but definitely it's worth it. I just wish every kid knew that." Jeff "[The choice based approach] helps students to be nicer to each other and to like themselves. We have a voice and we can use it. We can learn things that we want to learn about and what we want to do in the future." Atavia

Summary

There have been numerous studies on motivation and self-determination theory and the link between agency and well-being has been made. However, before tackling the question that underpinned this study, I realized that there needed to be a more thorough explanation regarding the connections between autonomy, competency and relatedness and the roles of agency and well-being. I also noticed that the voices of students regarding their own engagement and well-being were lacking in what I had encountered in the published literature. My definition of well-being incorporated Ryan and Deci's (1985) needs of autonomy, relatedness and competency for well-being, in addition to Bandura's notion of human agency, referring to the capacity of

individuals to act independently and make their own choices. In asking the students how the

Choice and Voice approach impacted them, I aimed to use deductive reasoning to draw out the

major components of the self-determination theory: relatedness, autonomy and competency. As

students shared their experiences, I came to realize that engagement/enjoyment was a product of

having relatedness, autonomy and competency. For each student, their path to engagement may

have varied, but in each case the first three needs were essential in fostering a sense of

enjoyment. Ultimately, with these needs in place you have agency, where students are

independently thinking and/or acting differently. The role of agency for well-being is an

inductive finding that I will analyze further in Chapter Five.

      Throughout the interviews, sub-themes emerged that added more depth to the meaning of

the needs. For example, in asking the students, "How did the reading/writing/inquiry activities

impact your sense of feeling connected to others?" I discovered that often students needed to feel

a sense of connectedness to what they were doing, which leads to feeling connected to others.

Connecting to oneself became a sub-theme of relatedness. I found that relatedness, autonomy

and competency interconnect; when you feel connected to yourself, you open up to others,

gaining autonomy and competency. In meeting the need of autonomy, I found students not only

needed choice in their learning they also needed to develop skills of critical thinking,

communication, collaboration and creativity. These four C's of 21st century learning became a

new sub-theme that I discuss further in Chapter Five. The sub-themes revealed within the main

theme of competence were "having feedback" and "direct instruction", which in turn led to

increased confidence in learning. The findings reveal the Reading and Writing Workshop and

inquiry projects discussed by the students represented learning material that they felt was put to

good use and simultaneously increased their motivation to learn. On the other hand, learning in

order to get grades decreased their motivation. The more competent a student perceived

herself/himself to be, the more motived s/he was.

As noted above, an important finding in the data, that was not easily found in the

literature, was the overall theme of agency for well-being. Students expressed their agency

through being more open-minded and empathetic, in taking action in the school and community

and expressing a need to give advice to educators. In the end, students reflected on the impact the

Choice and Voice approach had. Atavia said it best: "My personality changed a lot. I want to

learn about stuff. I want to change the world… I can do this!"

Overall, the participants recognized that the *Choice and Voice* approach had a positive

impact on their agency for well-being. During the interview and focus group discussion, students

reflected on their experiences and gained a self-understanding of how having choice impacted

their agency for well-being. A comment from Rhiannon is relevant here:

> When people get scared or see something that is unknown to them they act out harshly or
>
> they don't act at all, they ignore. They don't acknowledge anything, and it's not so much a
>
> thing of being mean as it is of not being educated. They don't fully understand what's
>
> going on, [or] how they view the world, because they are taught in a box that doesn't fully
>
> let them go free. (Rhiannon)

Rhiannon revealed that is not possible to be open-minded if one is ignorant. The same

goes for agency. It's more than acting, it's being informed and acting on beliefs.

Participating in this research provided students with the opportunity to revisit moments

from the past, which became personally fulfilling and built self-confidence. Mitzi's words

represent insight into the writing process and the impact it had on her:

I mostly changed emotionally and mentally. This *Choice and Voi*ce approach taught me

many things, to see the silver lining in things, to think deeply and outside the box. By the

time Grade 8 came, I was able to express myself way easier. It taught me to tell a story in

a way more engaging, and exhilarating way to the reader's heart… or just making an

impact you know. We live in such a chaotic and very emotional generation, teenagers are

hiding the heavy burdens that they are feeling that they don't have to hide. I strongly

believe that people should learn how to express themselves through writing when they

see that verbally speaking isn't an option. Actions could be so loud, but what more if you

start writing your thoughts down and slowly becoming someone better because you

already have let go of that burden through writing, I experienced that writing your

thoughts down can boost up your mental health. I'm not cooped up all by myself

anymore because I've already expressed what I'm feeling through writing and I saw that

it was enough.

Through the voices of the students it is evident that much was gained in terms of their

relationships with others, their confidence, independence, engagement and overall agency for

well-being.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

I have applied a *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, b) framework to explore my research question. Self-determination theory (SDT) advocates that people are "rational, meaning-making agents who are self-governing and who exercise their autonomy and develop their competencies in relations with others" (Helwig & McNeil, 2011, p. 241). SDT assumes that all students have psychological needs that "provide a motivational foundation for their optimal functioning, academic engagement, constructive social development, and personal wellbeing" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002 as cited in Reeve, 2006, p. 226). Many studies have used SDT as a conceptual framework to examine the personal and environmental factors that impact students' academic achievement, engagement, creativity, and well-being. In my review of such publications, I have noticed a lack of discussion on the impact of agency on well-being. Research on the choice and voice-based approach can contribute to knowledge on the causes of certain behaviours and the design of classroom environments that optimize students' development and well-being.

I begin this chapter with an explanation of my purpose for the research. This follows with a discussion of each theme and the sub-themes revealed through the individual interviews with fifteen participants and the focus group discussion with nine of the fifteen interviewees. I link research on each theme– autonomy (motivation, choice), relatedness, competency, engagement, agency and well-being, with what the students said. In doing so, I analyze the findings and draw conclusions based on data (research plus students' voices). The findings are presented in such a way that I take into consideration how the *Choice and Voice* philosophy could impact teachers' practices.

Why Do This?

There are policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators who have focused on the control of standardized outcomes for formal education and on the use of rote learning, tangible rewards, competition and assessments for attaining these learning and behavioural outcomes. Contemporary research is finding that many of these specified outcomes and pedagogies diminish learners' autonomy, motivation, learning and overall well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2016; Guay et al., 2016).

During the focus group discussion with nine students on December 14, 2018, a number of those participating reflected on their experience in high school, where the focus is on marks, without any explanation or feedback on how to improve. Brady (focus group), as one example, said,

> The point of handing in an essay and having a mark is not to get a number. It's to get, 'oh here's where you messed up, here's where you could use improvement.' But what do we get? A number.

Students were more motivated when they felt that their teacher was taking part in the learning process with them as opposed to *"just being on the sidelines"* (Karley, focus group). The following response from Alika (focus group) makes this important role of the teacher clear:

> I think another thing that helps is when your teachers are involved in the process of it. So you guys did editing with us, and you helped us with multiple drafts. Whereas now it's kind of like 'okay this is what you're writing, do your drafts, if you can't get a friend to edit it, edit it yourself and then hand it in'.

Such comments highlight the importance of moving away from controlled environments in which teacher mentoring and feedback are low. Moreover, the experiences of these students

substantiate the work of Ryan and Deci who have found that students who have higher levels of

intrinsic motivation "learn and perform better and display greater classroom adjustment

[engagement] and better psychological well-being than those whose levels of autonomous

motivation are low (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Ryan & Deci, 2013 as cited in Deci & Ryan, 2016, p.

11).

Autonomy → Motivation

Autonomous motivation involves the experience of choice rather than coercion

(Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006). When students in the study before you could freely choose

their own personal topics, they expressed greater motivation to do their work. Aya (interview),

for example, shared the following: "When I choose my writing, I want to write more because I

choose it, so I want to write about it."

According to Ryan and Deci (2000a), "People whose motivation is authentic (literally,

self-authored) compared to those that are controlled, have more interest, excitement and

confidence, which in turn leads to enhanced well-being" (p. 69). This position was clearly

expressed by Nicole (focus group): "One of the most important things is engaging in the learning

process. If you choose what you want to learn about, you'll be more engaged about it." In

controlled classrooms with few if any opportunities for student choice there is more of a focus on

extrinsic motivation, such as marks. There is a distinction between intrinsic motivation, which

refers to "doing something because it is inherently interesting, and extrinsic motivation, which

refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 55).

This distinction is articulated in a comment made by Hayden (interview):

I feel like I did a good job on something after I put time into something that I care about

or that I wanted to work on. Then it feels better than, like, I guess something that other

people wanted me to do.

However, having choice does not mean students will only learn about subjects they find

personally interesting. Students can also be autonomously motivated if they understand and

accept the value of the activities for themselves when the activities are not inherently interesting

to them (Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985 as cited in Deci & Ryan, 2016).

The factors that facilitate intrinsic motivation support the need for autonomy and

competence. Autonomy supportive teachers, who foster curiosity and a desire for challenge,

offer choices and opportunities for self-direction (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Students, such as Jeff

quoted below, were able to reflect on the inquiry projects they selected and researched, and while

many noted that the work was often more intellectually challenging and required more effort and

investment on their part, it was also more intrinsically rewarding because of that effort and

investment. Jeff and Jon worked together on an inquiry project where they investigated the roots

of hatred possessed by terrorists and showed their learning by acting out an interrogation. Jeff

describes his "inquiry through literature project", where he read the book *Give a Boy a Gun*,

researched the impact of bullying on school shooters, and synthesized his information by

creating a journal in the mind of a school shooter.

"Well it was challenging, but it was more involving. It kind of like brought you in. It

intrigued you. And you end up learning a lot more, I felt like." (Jeff, interview)

Intrinsic motivation results in high quality learning and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

However, given that many learning activities in schools are not designed to be intrinsically

interesting, how does a teacher motivate students to value such activities? (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Teachers must help students come to understand how a skill, topic, or process could become of personal value, even if they cannot immediately connect to it. For example, teachers can link the value of learning about different topics to students' lives beyond the classroom. Sarah (exit slip), who is now in a post-secondary education program, reflects on the value of being challenged to learn different forms of writing:

> The fact that I was taught poetry, memoir, short story, etc. was useful in high school and in various volunteer positions. Ultimately, it demonstrated the potential the subject of English has and inspired me to use this [choice and voice] approach in my future teaching career.

Autonomy Supporting Classrooms

> At the beginning we were given choices…it was a wide range, but I stuck within them. But in the end, I found what I was interested in…and that helped me push myself and learn even more [about] what I wanted to learn, which is important because that has carried on today. (Kaylyn, interview)

Teachers can build students' capacity for choice and decision-making simply by providing a range of options and helping them to discover and explore their interests. As Kaylyn's quote above demonstrates, students in an autonomy-supportive environment gradually gain the motivation, confidence and self-awareness to make increasingly independent decisions about their preferred learning styles and topics. Her experience supports research by Deci and colleagues (1994, as cited in Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006) and Guay and colleagues, 2016). As Deci and colleagues assert:

> Autonomy-supportive approaches entail taking (or empathizing with) students' perspectives, acknowledging their needs and feelings, providing support when they face

obstacles, and providing choice and supporting initiative where possible. In

circumstances where choice is constrained, educators provide a meaningful rational.

(1994, p. 21)

In addition, allowing students to work at their own pace and providing positive, clear and

timely informational feedback helps to satisfy the need for autonomy and competence (Deci &

Ryan, 2016; Jang et al., 2016). In using non-controlling language (avoiding threat, punishment or

rewards to motivate behaviours), teachers communicate to students a tone of support and

understanding, such as "I am your ally; I am here to support you and your strivings" (Reeve,

2015 as cited in Jang et al., 2016, p. 687). While at the same time, teachers nudge students to a

higher level. Sarah (focus group) felt this support in the classes I taught. She said, "The effort put

forth by the students was returned by those who taught."

Syd Korsunsky (Mr. K.) and I believe that our job is to coach our students through

instructional components, with the goal for students to become more autonomous over time.

Karley's (focus group) experience was typical of many students in that she gained confidence

and felt more comfortable exerting her independence as she practiced autonomous decision-

making in the classroom. She conveyed the following: "At first you guys have to help us out,

give us a little push, but once you get the hang of it, you're totally more independent and

confident with yourself."

To begin teaching in students' preferred ways involves: (1) becoming aware of students'

preferences and (2) adapting one's instruction so as to teach in those preferred ways (Jang et al.,

2016, p. 688, and Ryan & Deci 2016). This collaboration between teacher and student allows the

student to develop greater insight into their own preferred learning style and what works best for

them. Students, such as Karley (interview), found that they were able to persevere and discover

the ways of learning to which they connected best when other modes were not a good fit. She

shared:

> I was never really a writer because I just found it boring because there was always like,
>
> 'Step one, step two.' But this way there was less boundaries. You got to make it your
>
> own way and experience different things. So if you didn't like one thing you could try
>
> another until you found what was fitting for you… When you're not forced to do
>
> something, you like it more.

Through a process of trial and error and self-discovery, Karley and others were able to

individualize their learning. This practice resulted in new possibilities opening up for them.

According to Jang et al. (2016), the opportunity to individualize leads to an increase in students'

engagement, enjoyment and their understanding of the learning material.

Accommodating students' preferences should be done within a context of good

pedagogical practice, which does not simply mean accommodating all student preferences. Jang

et al. (2016) encourage teachers to dialogue with students in order to determine instructional

methods that promote autonomy. In satisfying students' need for autonomy, students "engage in

a deep and thoughtful (i.e., conceptual) processing of learning material" (Jang et al., 2016, p.

688). Many of the students reflected on the quality and depth of their learning when they were

able to have more choice, contrasting that with experiences where they felt they had less control

and autonomy in the classroom. Rhiannon (interview) noted that the work she did often required

a high level of reflection and analysis: "The stuff that we did of analyzing things, say like in

Reading Workshop, and inquiry, in any type of writing, you had us dig deeper in our writing all

the time." Rhiannon researched gender identity for one of her inquiry projects, where she

interviewed a staff member from the Rainbow Resource Centre about LGBTTQ issues and

created a diary of a transgendered teen for her final synthesis project.

Choice

Having choice in the classroom does not mean that students are left to fend for

themselves. Reeve (2006) argues that "lack of structure yields not an autonomy-supportive

environment but instead one that is permissive, indulgent, or laissez-faire" (p. 231). Student

participants in the study before you benefited from having individual conferences with me (their

teacher) to explore and discuss possible choices. Karley (interview) expressed the value of this

personalized approach:

> When you actually give people choice and you go out to children individually, that's what
>
> actually helps them out and makes them learn more and experience more. Just that one-
>
> on-one with the choice, like working on their individual piece instead of everyone's all at
>
> once.

According to the self-determination theory, providing students with opportunities to

make choices, explore and try new things can help them feel more autonomous, competent and

thus more engaged (Patall et al., 2008, as cited in Ryan & Deci, 2016). However, this does not

mean letting students do whatever they want. As Jang et. al (2010) recommend, teachers also

need to provide structure with clear guidelines, goals and limits, but not in a controlling

approach.

Some would define structure as being linear, where you follow a course of study in a

hierarchical manner. We, Mr. K. and the TELA group of teachers, see structure as the foundation

on which learning is scaffolded, and the process of learning is often recursive. That is, we keep

returning to previous lessons. We've found that students especially need a strong understanding

of "how?" and "why?" and that is the structure upon which the learning occurs. It's not a visible

structure. Some may see choice and voice classrooms as chaotic, because they see students

working more autonomously. Autonomous learning is our goal. Each student in actual fact has

structure within the context in which s/he is working. Indicators of this structure include students

and teachers collaborating to set deadlines (which is a form of adaptation), students engaging

with different forms or genres of writing, assignments tailored to individual students rather than

a whole classroom, and students having their own writing handbooks with mini-lessons to

consult as opposed to rubrics. From the teachers' perspective it can at times feel chaotic simply

because you can be in a position where you simultaneously have twenty-five different mindsets

when conferencing and working with a class of students.

There are always subject-specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge that students need to

learn, but there are also ways to incorporate choices into the learning activities. For example,

students need to read, but do they all need to read the same book or be told exactly what to read?

Giving students a choice in their independent book selection will foster a love of reading, which

is better than having them read something they do not understand or do not find interesting.

Sarah (focus group) is one of the participants in the study that specifically addressed this topic.

She recalled:

> In your class you could pick a book that was at your level because you have the choice to
>
> do so, right? Whereas in this class [I'm currently in], it was like, 'good luck if you don't
>
> understand the book'. That's what I liked about the choice and voice technique is that it
>
> appeals to so many different students, and it was way more enjoyable and challenging.

How can one be engaged in an assigned book if they don't have the necessary background

knowledge (schema) and/or interest in a particular topic? Some of the participating students, like

Mitzi (interview), reported being initially overwhelmed by the prospect of selecting their own topics for research. She said,

> I think for me at first it was difficult, because I was going from structured to more choice. But along the way I was, with your help and with other students from grade eight last year, I was able to... [make my own choices].

It's clear from Mitzi's comment that teachers can support students as they gain confidence in their own ability to make choices by gradually increasing students' initiative and control (a scaffolding approach) until they feel secure and capable enough to be making decisions independently. Jeff wrote in his final Grade 8 memoir about how he came to the realization that he was capable of making his own decisions, including the decision to stay another year in our class.

> I open my eyes and look around my dark room. 'Wait, if I have been making my own decisions since I was five then I should be able to make my own decision at thirteen.' I say [this] aloud for no reason but to make it feel real to myself. Finally, I come to a conclusion. After a lot of hard thinking, I finally have it. I don't know how I obtained it, but it feels right.

Relatedness

"Relatedness is the need to feel significant and connected to important others. Relatedness is experienced when one cares for and is cared for by important others, and is thwarted when one experiences isolation or disconnection" (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2016, p. 2039). According to Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation flourishes in environments that promote a sense of security and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000a). Students in the study before you who described being motivated, felt connected to and cared for by their

peers and teachers. According to Sarah (interview), *"Having that connection, hearing different students work, it definitely helped that sense of connection and sense of accomplishment that we knew we were doing it."* Ryan and Deci (2016) have also identified a correlation between relatedness and support for autonomy. One area that stood out in the focus group interview was how individual students connected to their self. Atavia (focus group), for example, said, *"It helped me go through a lot of things and open up more about my personality and give me more self-confidence."* Brady (focus group) described how relating to the work of others influenced his own writing: "It's like when you read other things written by other people you add like a sort of humanity to your writing."

"It is out of the desire to be related to others, to feel part of a family, group, or social order, that individuals are inclined to take on the values, beliefs, and behaviors that are endorsed by those others" (Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006, p. 21). Many students remarked on the personal nature of their work and how it created a feeling of connection and trust; as though they were part of a family. This was clearly expressed by Atavia (interview) when she stated, *"I think it also made our class more like a family almost, how we all cared about each other, because we all knew each other's certain stories…we knew stuff about each other that other people wouldn't."* Ryan and Deci (2000b) argue that students who feel respected and cared for by their teacher will be more willing to accept the classroom values. Guay and colleagues (2016) suggest that teachers interested in establishing positive relationships with students, will find it beneficial to meet with students one-on-one to discuss their values, needs and interests.

Relating to Students

Reeve (2006) outlines four teacher characteristics that foster positive teacher-student relationships and impact students' academic functioning. These are attunement, supportiveness,

gentle discipline, and relatedness. Attunement is when teachers sense a students' state of being and adjust their instruction accordingly (Reeve, 2006). Mitzi (interview) stated that being able to share her work with her teacher led to a greater sense of connection both with her writing and her teacher: "…I was able to be more engaged by sharing my pieces with you." Supportiveness is a teacher's encouragement of a student's capacity for self-direction (Reeve, 2006). The more supportive teachers are, the more competent students feel. Sarah (interview) makes an important distinction between feeling supported in her learning as opposed to simply being told what to do. She said, "You taught us how to do something, and didn't tell us exactly WHAT to do. You led us to the finish line, but didn't push us over the line." Gentle discipline is "a supportive socialization strategy that involves guiding and explaining why one way of thinking or behaving is right and another is wrong" (Reeve, 2006, p. 233). Teacher relatedness is explained by Reeve (2006) as students feeling special and important to the teacher. In order for students to open up, teachers need to be open as well. Karley (focus group) made the following observation: "I think as you're learning in this way, you realize how different everyone is and how everyone does learn differently. I think to be able to teach this way, it doesn't just relate to the students, it relates to the teachers too."

Attending to the Opposite Effects

The learning environment in which students develop is crucial in helping each student meet her or his needs. Classrooms where these needs are neglected are unhealthy for students, and, as Ryan and Deci (2000a) point out, it is not a matter of attending to some needs and not others. They write: "Individuals cannot thrive without satisfying all of them, any more than people can thrive with water but not food." (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 75). Guay and colleagues (2016) support this view with the following statement: "Instead of nurturing curiosity and a

desire to learn, some schools place the accent on control, reward, assessment, and competition, which impede the development of high-quality motivation" (Guay et al., 2016, p. 83). Pressuring students into compliance results not only in a lack of initiative but also in distress and psychopathology (Reeve, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000). A comparable example is employment. Few adults in the job market would be happy to work in a rigid climate that quashed all initiative. Many would quit.

Participants in the study were able to see a connection between their freedom of choice and their level of interest and enjoyment, which they suggested extended beyond choices in the classroom. Jon (interview) shared the following perception of his experience:

> When you do what you want to do obviously you're enjoying it a lot more. Choosing a career path if you're told you have to do it, obviously you're going to dread going to work every day. School is sort of like a job in that kind of way. So for sure having choice definitely made everything a lot easier on myself, because I wanted to do it and it was a lot more enjoyable and fun for that entire year.

Autonomy supportive teachers acknowledge students' expressions of negative affect, which do exist. It is with this awareness, that they move towards identifying students' interests by creating a classroom environment that provides students with "clarity of what to do along with a freedom for choice, voice, and initiative" (Reeve, 2006, p. 232).

By individualizing assignments, I and TELA members are trying to have every student surpass what they had accomplished in the past. That means we are always challenging students to grow. I am not suggesting that this works with every student. On occasion I have encountered students who are either reluctant or never buy into the choice and voice philosophy. For some of these students it isn't a lack of ability, it is an unwillingness to take risks or to be challenged.

Sometimes it is simply an aversion to opening up. In each of these cases, the teacher's job is to

try to determine what the factors are that are inhibiting that student's performance and, once

determined, to try to adapt accordingly. In the process of studying the case histories of these

students, I've come to realize that they tend to be students who have struggled in school in

previous years. This is an obstacle that all teachers face regardless of how they teach. On

occasion, I've encountered a high-performance student who is initially resistant, but comes

around. Riley and Hayden, two participants in this study, were such students for a variety of

reasons. In the beginning, it took time and effort on my part to find ways that encouraged them to

get on board. When they were no longer reluctant, they went from being slightly oppositional to

leaders. Much of that transition occurred when they found their own voice, as Riley expressed in

his exit slip:

> The whole "Choice and Voice approach" has helped me become a better person both on
>
> paper and in the real world. The writing piece, "Keepin' it Positive" (Appendix X), I
>
> chose is a prime example of how it's helped me. Without this approach I would not have
>
> been able to express my thoughts and feeling on this writing piece. It made me enjoy
>
> English 10 times more that way, and I wish for it to come into high school as well.

Competence

"Competence is the need to experience efficacy and mastery in important activities in

one's life" (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2016, p. 2039). Competence occurs in environments that

provide students with opportunities to acquire skills and improve with feedback that informs

students about their current performance and guides them towards achieving their goals (DeHaan

Hirai, & Ryan, 2016 and Guay et al., 2016). When I first began teaching, I would combine marks

on assignments with comments, and I observed what much of the literature seems to confirm;

students look at the grades, compared them with their classmates and ignored the comments. As I

moved towards focusing more on descriptive feedback, without grades, I noticed a major shift.

The descriptive feedback I now give is ongoing over a period of weeks as students progress

through their writing pieces and projects. That is, I work side-by-side with the students giving

feedback at teachable moments to nudge them forward. For students like Aya (interview), an

English as a second language student, the feedback she received from her teachers was crucial

for developing her sense of competency in her language skills, which in turn lead to motivation

to write more. She explained: "Yes, sometimes Mr. K. [Syd], when he would tell me you have

to do this because it doesn't... and then later he would tell me 'great job!' and that would make me

more happy and I would want to write more."

In class, this descriptive feedback occurs for the duration of my conferencing with

individual students. At other times, it is through the sharing of written documents. An example of

our descriptive feedback is shown in a wonder inquiry by Brady titled "What If" (see Appendix

Y).

Communicating through "competence-affirming" feedback to explain why students are

doing well or when treating students' poor performances as problems to be solved, the goal is to

help students better understand the cause of their performance and what actions need to be taken

to improve (Reeve, 2006). This approach was equally motivating for students who struggled and

for those who possessed strong writing skills, such as Sarah. During the focus group she said:

> I think for me, because I was a stronger student, I think you were able to give me advice
>
> that pushed me to the next level. And because everything was more individualized, you
>
> knew your students enough to know what level they were at and help them get to the next
>
> level.

Sarah's comment illustrates that in order to increase competence, students need to be provided with a sense of autonomy. Teaching in students' preferred ways increases both autonomy and competence-need satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Jang et al., 2016).

Previous research has already demonstrated how essential autonomy and competence are for well-being. "All people need to feel both competent and autonomous in order to be healthy, effective, and intrinsically motivated" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, as cited in Deci & Ryan, 2016, p. 13). Alika (interview) articulates this principle when she expresses her own feelings of autonomy and confidence:

> Being able to pick my own topic …definitely made me feel more confident. Because you knew it was something you cared about, something you were able to put onto the paper and be able to discuss with other people.

In thinking about what helped the students become more competent readers, writers and thinkers, I asked students in the focus group discussion to reflect on "things you feel you do now as researchers/learners that you feel was embedded as part of your middle school experience?" Karley and Alika (focus group) mentioned that they self-edit now and use most of the exercises in their writing. As teachers our job is to coach students in learning how to craft a piece of writing, revise and edit, as well as to give each student the freedom to write about what matters to them. Alika (focus group) reflected on the way she had been taught and shared the following view: "I found that our classes became way more opinionated just because we had options." In order to gain competency, it was revealed that options, direct instruction and ongoing feedback were essential.

Engagement

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness alongside students' internalized interests work together to motivate students, like Brady (interview), to engage. He said, "Traditionally it's difficult to write about something you don't want to write about, so I guess we would naturally just not put as much effort into it, but if you're writing about something you like, you want to put in as much effort in it as possible." "Teachers and classroom events can nurture and strengthen, or thwart and weaken, students' autonomous motivation." (Reeve, 2006, p. 226). It became obvious throughout the focus group discussion that many of the students felt disengaged with their high school writing assignments. Atavia (focus group), as one example, proclaimed:

> Most of the essays we do in high school are on things that aren't even beneficial to our learning, it's just about a book and what the character is experiencing and it doesn't go into any other depth than that.

Nowhere did their feelings appear more clearly than when discussing what they perceived as the essay. *"*With the essays [assigned in high school] you can't put like anything about your opinion at all. It all has to be factual" (Nicole, focus group). These essays contrasted with what they experienced in Middle School where the qualities of a true essay included writing what you are passionate about and backing up your personal opinion with your own beliefs. There was not an expectation to state the thesis at the beginning of the essay or to limit writing to a specific number of paragraphs. We encouraged students to imply their thesis, what they truly believe, which allowed students to connect with what they were writing in a deeper, more personal way. This is shown in Aya's turning point essay "For the Better," in which she wrote about the moment she realized, "having a teacher who let me work at things that interested me in reading

and writing helped me to grow as a learner. I chose books about the things I love: sports,

adventure, and games. I was also allowed to read books in Arabic!"

It is important for teachers to explain the relevance of learning material in order for

students to value its meaning and worth. "It is these meanings that become internalized and

integrated in environments that provide supports for the needs for competence, relatedness, and

autonomy" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p.64). This is especially useful in cases where students may

have lower interest in the material. If teachers can help students see the longer-term relevance to

themselves, they are more likely to become more engaged with the activities, understand the

material in more depth and feel more competent (Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006).

Agency

When schools facilitate self-determined learning, they foster the conditions that satisfy

the three basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, which support the ability to be

agentic (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Several students expressed agency in terms of the classroom. Jon

took control over his attitude and actions. During the interview, he described this change:

> I looked more positively towards assignments/projects, showed more interest during class
>
> and had more respect and empathy towards you and Mr. K. than previous teachers for
>
> allowing me to choose what I wanted to work on.

Four of the participating students, namely Karley, Sarah, Kaylyn, and Mitzi, who were older

and/or outgoing, changed how they acted not only in the classroom but also in the community.

Kaylyn (exit slip) attributed her change to choice and what having choice made possible. She

wrote:

> Having the option in the classroom to choose empowered me to have the confidence to
>
> choose outside. Choice has given me many options as I've never been afraid to ask

questions or change what I thought could be made better including working for SWAT, when none of my other friends joined, and even continues now though university as I have the confidence that I can do what I set my mind to. This confidence began when I was given choice where I hadn't before.

When people are able to pursue their own personal interests and act with their own rights and freedoms in the world, they experience agency (Helwig & McNeil, 2011). Thus, it is important that teachers help students "develop as free and autonomous agents who have control of key aspects of their lives, and help them to develop their capacities as human beings (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999 as cited in Helwig & McNeil, 2011, p. 242)." When Sarah (interview) wrote about her disability in Grade 7, she said:

> It's all about having that background and having that confidence. You kinda sparked something in me. If it made a difference in one class, what if I did that on a larger scale? What if I tried to do that to people other than teachers who know me and students who know me?

Today Sarah has done it on a much larger scale. She is currently a national spokesperson for people living with Dystonia, and in this role Sarah has addressed more than a dozen classrooms just in our school division.

This study demonstrates that a *Choice and Voice* based philosophy promotes students' ability to identify intrinsically significant goals. At the same time, it also equips them with the skills to competently and independently achieve those goals, which leads to greater agency and contributes to the well-being of both the student and the broader community to which they belong. Rhya, as the following excerpt from her exit slip shows, gained empathy through her residential school inquiry project, which is a step towards having greater agency in taking action.

I think we learnt about a lot of interesting, yet hard topics. For example, the residential

school movie we watched really opened eyes to the horrible things some people went

through before, and I think that can relate to my mindset of not wanting to judge anyone

because you never know what they have went through or are going through.

When individuals have a high degree of agency freedom, they can often choose to use

their agency to enhance the lives of others, particularly those who may have fewer advantages

(Sen, 2009). In Hayden's poetry, he expresses how seeing the pain and suffering of others has

inspired him to be an agent for change in the world.

"Cold Hands"

Why is that I live in a world so temporary
that I can only think for my future?
Not my children's future
or my grandchildren's?
This life, this world
even this universe
is only temporary

But that doesn't mean I can sit idly by
While my fellow human race in Africa starves
and indigenous women in Canada are
raped and murdered without punishment

While the pollution levels
continue to rise
surpassing the expectations every year

While people in third world countries
around the world are forced into slavery by us
While children have to work
instead of learning to better their country

We sit idly by expecting our children will fix this
our grandchildren will fix this

No!
We need to fix it!

> This is our fight
> just as much as it is the people's suffering
>
> Now this sounds like a lot
> but if everyone in the world
> chipped in and united
> then it would seem like a lot less
>
> But that's the problem
>
> If I don't change.

In this case, agency can lead to pursuing well-being goals beyond the individual: to "intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). Such intention was demonstrated by the choices of several of the students interviewed for this study, including Mitzi (interview) who shared the following experience.

> The homelessness one really got me thinking, because. It was last summer I think, I really wanted to do volunteering when we visited Siloam Mission. I think this is something that I am totally going to bring with me through the rest of my life, like in work too.

Overall Well-being

The satisfaction of the three basic needs (relatedness, autonomy, competency) by teachers provides students with "the psychological nutriments necessary for learning, positive classroom functioning, and psychological well-being" (Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009 as cited in Jang et al., 2016, p. 687). Numerous studies have shown the crucial role of these basic psychological need satisfactions for well-being (Chen et al., 2015). Ryan et al. (2010) showed that the experiences of autonomy and competence, led to better days on average. Karley's (exit slip) experience with choice and voice is an example of well-being and better days.

> The choice and voice approach has 100% affected my well-being; with everything in my life. Writing helped me figure out who I was, along with [my] dreams and desires. It had

taught me lifelong lessons that will not only help my skill in Reading and Writing

Workshop, but in life in general.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the capability approach and self-determination theory both

evaluate the aspects that are critical to well-being. The capability approach and SDT relate as

"capabilities afford people opportunities to pursue what they find worthwhile and thus conduce

to greater basic psychological need satisfaction, which in SDT underlies wellness and vitality"

(DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2016, p. 2040). Rhya (interview) described the impact having choice

had on her well-being: "The very broad topics got us to think and choose from something we

actually wanted to do, and I think in that way everyone's voice can be heard. I think it did impact

my well-being for those reasons, it made school more fun and kept me interested."

According to Amartya Sen, a major advocate of the capability approach, "wellness

requires that persons must have capabilities, the latter conceptualized as a reflection of the

freedom to achieve valuable functioning" (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2016, p. 2038). This allows

people to freely pursue what they value. In order for wellness and social justice to become

attainable in society, people need to possess the capabilities that allow them to flourish

(Nussbaum 2006, as cited in DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2016). In her exit slip, Kaylyn reflected on

what helped her grow as a young person into adulthood. She wrote, "I think choice has impacted

my well-being. Being given a voice at such a young age has allowed me to continue to have a

strong voice into adulthood. Knowing what I deserve and what other people deserve is an

identifier of the person I have become and what I hope to do in my life."

Choice Vs. Control

In Karley's interview she reflected on the benefits of the choice and voice based approach

in comparison to a more traditional classroom:

Every student is different, because of all their different experiences. They also have

different needs that you as a teacher are supposed to look at individually. Where if you

are teaching a traditional method, you are usually looking at the students as a class, like

you are looking at them as a whole, which you shouldn't be. You want everyone to

succeed, so when you are giving them choice, you can look at each student individually

and figure out what they need and how you can get there with them.

Numerous studies reveal the benefits of an autonomy supportive program, compared to a more

traditionally controlled classroom (Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006). The studies cited by

Reeve (2006) reveal that in supportive conditions students' demonstrate:

"greater perceived competence (Deci et al., 1981), higher mastery motivation (Ryan &

Grolnick, 1986), enhanced creativity (Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri, & Holt, 1984), a

preference for optimal challenge over easy success (Shapira, 1976), increased conceptual

understanding (Benware & Deci, 1984), active and deeper information processing

(Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), greater engagement (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Barch, & Jeon,

2004), positive emotionality (Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993), higher intrinsic

motivation (Reeve, Nix, & Hamm, 2003), enhanced well-being (Black & Deci, 2000),

better academic performance (Boggiano, Flink, Shields, Seelbach, & Barrett, 1993), and

academic persistence rather than dropping out of school." (Reeve, 2006, p. 228).

In order to practice their craft well, SDT suggest that teachers also need support for autonomy

and need to be trained in autonomy-supportive practices (Guay et al., 2016). I am currently part

of a group of teachers in my school division that has expanded. In the last few years I have gone

from being a novice member of what was called the TELA group, who supported me in my early

struggles, and now play more of a mentorship role in the divisional group, hosting a number of

teachers who visit my classroom. Recently, as a result of a workshop I presented at the Manitoba

Middle Years Association's SAGE Conference on October 19, 2018, we formed a new group

called MMYA, SAGE. The group offers online support to teachers across the province who are

implementing the *Choice and Voice* approach.

Although I faced the limitations of which students wanted to be interviewed for this

particular study, I am constantly addressing that in the way I have opened up my classroom to

many teachers over the years. The results have been encouraging because so many of them have

become part of our larger learning group. Visitors to my classroom have validated that what we

are doing is important. They are seeing the true range of students I deal with, from the most

committed ones, to the ones who are struggling. Some of the teachers I have mentored are now

implementing this approach, have opened up their classrooms and are seeing similar results.

The overall findings demonstrate the more that students' needs are met, the better they

learn, and the more positive they feel. Jon articulated the shift in his feelings towards school in

his exit slip as well as in a memoir he wrote in Grade 8 ("Involved in a Different Way, Appendix

Z).

> By being able to choose what I wanted to work on, I was excited to come to class
>
> everyday to continue working, instead of dreading coming to school and watching the
>
> clock all day waiting for 3:00. This continued throughout the day as I was excited to tell
>
> my family and friends about what we were working on and future plans for what was
>
> coming next.

Future Implications

Guay at al. (2016), suggest that future research could seek to understand *what* environmental factors at school lead to students having a "high self-determined motivating profile?" I aimed to reveal this by describing the impacts of implementing the *Choice and Voice* based approach. By observing what has been working and not working in our classrooms, I along with TELA members have continually been revising what our practice looks like. Just this year we have looked at how to begin the year with choice and voice and have revised this issue three times. Having a community of like-minded colleagues, reading books written by Penny Kittle, Linda Rief and Nancy Atwell, opening the classroom up for visitors, has me constantly re-evaluating what I am doing and how to improve. The power of this philosophy is that it is constantly being tweaked and there is no orthodoxy. I think Atavia said it best for both students and teachers: "We're evolving," and we are growing as unique individuals in a society, so the education system needs to as well. Choice based learning helps students of all abilities. "We're all different and at different learning levels" (Atavia, interview).

I believe the power of this approach in reading, writing and inquiry should continue into high school and post-secondary. Students need to be choosing topics they are invested in and that are meaningful to them in order to improve their writing and thinking. Having these choices and giving voice to their ideas bring well-being and with that, agency. Given all the experiences that I have had with the students, they have all gained autonomy, relatedness, and competence, but not all have expressed agency in terms of taking action. Agency is a longer-term process and may not be observable, for some, for years to come.

It is time we "liberate education" as Paulo Friere proposed in 1968. Freire shared that the ultimate goal is to see education as the "practice of freedom" in order for people to develop their

ability to think critically and come to see the world, "not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Friere, 2000, p. 83). Thus, education is an ongoing activity that should be revolutionary in order to end any forms of oppression/dehumanization. The important thing is for people to feel like "masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world…" (Freire, 2000, p. 124). If students felt as if they had a voice, wouldn't that help promote agency for well-being and end some of the oppression in the world?

Conclusion

Throughout this study I aimed to reveal an understanding of how each student participant experienced choice and the impact it had. Schools have always been known to provide structures and controls that influence, often negatively, the attitudes and overall well-being of students. In general, this study suggests that the greater control one has over one's actions leads to positive effects. To be self-determining, people must have choice. Not being able to choose has negative consequences, as the student's responses have shown. Although many of the students did not have the *Choice and Voice* approach in high school, it is still fresh in their minds, impacting them today. For some, they have been out of Grade 8 for five years and in speaking with them, it was as if they had just experienced their projects. This is the power of choice and voice.

Ryan and Deci (1995) argue that self-determination is an innate need that leads people to engage in interesting behaviours, which has the benefit to develop competencies. When students were given opportunities in the classroom to be self-determining, they gained competency, autonomy and relatedness. This in turn led to a greater sense of well-being and the development of agency. I found that when students discussed a lack of support for the three needs, it contributed to amotivation.

The research highlights the importance of creating classroom environments where students can explore, discover and learn. It was noted that in more outcome-focused, controlling environments, students lost intrinsic motivation/engagement. The reading, writing and inquiry-based activities described by the students participating in the study before you were found to be intrinsically motivating, because they satisfy the needs to feel competence, autonomy and relatedness. Students revealed supports for relatedness as they discussed contexts where they felt "secure, important, and cared for… they want to internalize the knowledge and practices of those around them" (Ryan and Deci, 2009, p. 172). In addition to relating to others, I added a new component: relatedness to self. This means the acceptance of self that supports the development of self-esteem. In linking with self-esteem, when students experienced positive feedback, their feelings of competence increased and, thus, they were more motivated. A lack of feedback, or negative feedback, especially in more controlling environments, undermined their sense of competence and motivation. On the other hand, when given choice and opportunities to self-initiate interest driven projects, students again reflected feeling enhanced motivation as well as a sense of autonomy.

To summarize, Ryan and Deci (2009) support the idea that when these needs are satisfied, people experience enjoyment and in turn they learn, grow and create. "Intrinsic motivation flourishes under conditions supporting autonomy and competence and wanes when these needs are thwarted" (Ryan & Deci, 2009, p. 174). A vast amount of research has been done to test the principles of self-determination theory in schools, and research has shown that autonomy support from teachers and parents facilitates students' intrinsic motivation and has promoted improvements in learning as well as psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2009). What I found lacking is the research on how the supports impact students' agency.

The findings of this study show that the choice and voice approach created a learning environment that supported self-determination, which led students to be more self-determining, gaining a sense of agency. The levels of agency varied as students described feeling motivated, interested and energized in their learning, while a few students gained competence to seek and conquer challenges outside of the classroom. To summarize, well-being is associated with acting agentically when one's needs are met; "human agency and true self-esteem require autonomy" (Deci & Ryan, 1995, p. 37).

The students revealed agentic behaviours that varied along a continuum: from making independent choices, to acting as agents for change in the education system. Autonomy was achieved in the classroom, but agency may not have been reflected by all students outside of the classroom. I think this may come with maturity, confidence and further autonomy support. I could work towards improving teaching with more action-oriented projects, such as the homelessness and climate change inquiries. With projects such as these projects, some participating students behaved more autonomously, their behavior promoted a stronger sense of self, thus further meeting their psychological needs. Behaviours that are self-determined (agentic), will enhance motivation, promote true self-esteem and enhance well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

In conclusion, relating to students, providing them with autonomy (choice and voice), and promoting feelings of competence will lead towards having agency for well-being. The feedback I have received from my students has impacted my own practice, as I have come to a greater understanding and value of what we humans need as learners in school and beyond. It is important that our current educational system pay more attention to the creation of autonomy supporting environments for both teachers and students to learn and grow. The participants'

contributions may help expand this choice-based approach to other classrooms. The goal of the

Choice and Voice-based approach is to positively address the needs of the whole child so they

gain agency for well-being. I am on a journey to get there, constantly re-evaluating my teaching.

I have learned a great deal from my students and, in moving forward, I know what truly

impacted them: it is having that choice and voice in their learning.

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Appendices

Note about editing students' work: Students do work on their own editing alongside the teacher, but not all pieces are put through a final teacher edit. Only pieces that became public or were published in class magazines went through a final edit. It is primarily the inquiry projects that did not receive a final edit.

Appendix A: Karley's Choice Letter

I'm that student; goes to class every day, doesn't get in trouble a lot, hands my work in on time, and doesn't complain about it.

I'm that kid who on road trips, instead of playing "I Spy," I played math games and did math worksheets. I never had a problem with it, I loved math. But with every other subject, something was never right, and I knew it.

***

Dear, my future teachers:

In my experience with myself and my friends included, we have been taught that for the 12 years of school we are supposed to sit down, shut up and put our hand up if we have a question.

And then we are expected to decide what to do with the rest of our lives.

It's a messed up system. Kids wake up everyday, then can barely roll out of bed. We all know this, we know it's not "safe", but it seems that everyone is just scared to admit it.

Something needs to change.

I'm Karley, a 14 year old grade 8 student in Ms. Hall's 7/8 multi-age class at ▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮ Community School. But I'm also someone who got to go to other classrooms in the division to help teach other students about what I've been learning. And sometimes I guess you could say I "teach" other teachers too.

You are probably wondering what this email is about; well I'm about to tell you. Not directly. In my classroom, and in a few others in this Division, we have been learning in a different way. A way that lets us students have more of a choice in what we are learning.

- *"We had more of a choice and option, our perspective on what we want to do. And whatever it is, is totally up to you." -Jessica (Grade 8 student in Ms. Hall's class)*

Kids sometimes can't think for themselves because most school focuses on the idea that there is always a "right" and a "wrong" answer. We have been learning that there is not always a simple "right or wrong answer" to anything and everything.

- *"It gave me more freedom." -Abby (Former student in Ms. Hall's 7/8 spilt class from 2015-2016)*

Schools should be better than years ago. Yet somehow kids are still being rated as "higher up" than others. We know that no two kids work the same; scientists have proof that no two brains are the same. Every child is different, everyone has different strengths, different weaknesses, different talents, different goals. So how does everyone learning the same things make sense, when everyone's brains work differently?

Recently when I was in a number of classes throughout the Division, I was talking to students about choice and asked them questions like…

· *"When did you start learning with more choice/voice?*
· *Is this way of learning harder for you?*
· *What are the ups and downs of learning this way?*
· *How is this way of learning "different."*

They responded with the following answers…

● *"It was more challenging but easier, because you have choice in your topic yourself, but it's better with choice."* -anonymous student
● *"You are learning how to do stuff for the future."* -anonymous student
● *"It makes you more appreciation for the writers of books because now I know how hard it is to write something."* -anonymous student
● *"It's difficult but in a more fun challenging way."* -anonymous student
● *"It will be easier next year for writing because I've had the proper tools so I would know how to do it."* -anonymous student
● *"The difference is that we can be more interested in writing a topic we actually want to write about and are passionate about."* -anonymous student
● *"I am going through a tough time in my life right now, and I like that I have that choice to write it about."* -anonymous student

Then a test comes around the corner and tells you who's smarter, you or your best friend. That's not true, because our grades don't show who we are and what we will become in life. So this whole thing may just turns some kids into machines, which no one wants. (I hope.)

● *"This way of learning was more fun, because I was good at writing what I cared about and because I actually wanted to write about it." -Nicole (Grade 9 student at ███,* *previously in Ms.Halls class from 2014-2016)*

So why does this "system" not change? Well maybe because most adults see nothing wrong with it! Perhaps they think that because they turned out "just fine" that everyone else will too.

● *"I think a lot of other classrooms need to see what could happen when we give student choice; I mean you guys are the future and I know that sounds cliché and cheesy and stuff*

like that, but it's true. We need to give you the skills that you need to be successful and to make change." -Jessica (teacher part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 7th year.)

But what if that's not always the case.

Everything in the world is changing; look at cars, houses, this city, the world! Just look around! Everything's changing . . . except this, our school system; It's been the same almost forever.

- *"Before coming into Ms. Hall's class in grade 8, I didn't really like English. Everything was always so structured, and the teachers told you exactly what you had to write about. With Ms. Hall and Mr. K, we always had a lot of choice towards what we wanted to write about." -Jon (in Ms. Hall's class for his grade 8 year (2013/2014).*

There are 24 hours in a day. My school starts at 8:25am and ends at 3:00pm, so my school is about 6½ hours, and by time I get home and unpack it's about 4:00. I usually I have a few hours of sports so at the end of the day, so during the week we spend more time at school then at home with our families and friends. An average of 190 times a year

Shouldn't we be enjoying this time at school?

- *"Definitely in our school there are so many diverse needs in the classroom; teachers cannot meet them all by just following curriculum so, by giving choice, you're definitely going to provide better learning opportunities and you're going to meet more needs and you're going to have happier kids and happier teachers." -Sharon (teacher part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 2nd year.)*

Finland has one of the top schooling systems in the world, and guess what! They have shorter school days, less homework, no tests! They decided to teach the children to learn how to learn and not just how to take a test. In Finland the schools are small enough so all the teachers know every student's name because they go out of their way to know the child, not just how they score on a test or a rubric. They believe that they learn better when the children are ready and also that education is very important.

- *"I think that overall more teachers need to realize the needs of their classroom more, individual needs of their kids more and I think giving kids choice would help students be engaged more in the classroom and will help them overall with their thinking, their writing and their overall engagement in school." -Allison (teacher part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 3rd year.)*

All of these tests and homework and school work also lead to so much stress on the mind and body! If 8 in 10 college students experience stress in their daily lives how far can all of this go? That's just in college, what about all the people that are in school? And all of this stress gets worse every year because all of the students are drowning with not only school but things that are going on at home and with friends also, is it all worth this struggling?

- *"I don't have any regrets the time I spent learning in Ms. Hall's class opened me up to a very unique form of learning before I went on to high school and it was a great experience to have open choice in the projects it was offered in." -Kaylyn (Former student from 2012-2014)*

A lot of teachers feel alone, they struggle because they themselves don't always understand Language arts and feel they aren't teaching the best they can. It's such a vast area, and to cover it all in the year most teachers have, to accomplish all these children's' different needs when everyone is learning the same thing most teachers could say it's unfair.
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- *"I honestly can't think of anything I DON'T like about this style. What I love is to prove to so many adults - parents and other teachers - just what kids are truly capable of doing when given more voice in their own learning. And how instead of the quality going down, it actually goes up. A LOT!" -Syd Korsunsky (Retired teacher that started the "teaching with choice" group. The teacher who makes this all possible. He has been teaching with "choice" since the 1980's but has been teaching like this since 1988.)*

These students that are in classrooms, they are supposed to be learning and the teachers are supposed to be preparing these kids to graduate and create a solid life for themselves.

- *"I've learned that writing is hard and expecting kids to write is hard and that I need to be a writer myself in order to teach my kids to be writers." -Kristen (teacher part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 3rd year.)*

Did you know 1 in 10 Canadians don't have a high school diploma, and that only 1 out of 7 even have a university degree? There has been research done and they think the reasoning is because people lose the skills and knowledge about the things they have learned about in school. And I think the part of the reasoning of forgetting about it is because people don't care what they are learning about.

- *"I think the #1 thing is that we sell kids short. That kids are capable of so much more than we assume. And that by teaching traditional methods we limit their growth. It's like the box metaphor - we need to get students thinking "outside the box" - traditional methods are the opposite." -Syd Korsunsky*

You often hear people and teachers say that "school is preparing you for the real world." Well my teachers have taught me that this is the real world. This is our turn to shine. The people in school are the future, the people that are supposed to run the world when they grow up. How are we supposed to do that when everything we are going to learn, we may forget in 10 years? Or in ten minutes?

- *"Well I don't know if there is much that I don't like. I think that what I don't like is that I'm still on a learning curve. I don't know all the answers and that bugs me. Because I*

feel like I should know all the answers." - Lauren (teacher part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 4th year. Interviewed in front of her class.)

Some people don't understand how important school is. For an example, only 55% of organizations agreed that learning is top priority. It has gone down from 74% in the past two years. Canada's grades on adult skills have gotten worse in the past years and there are also lower numbers in students graduating with PhDs.

- *"I learned that I had come second in all of Manitoba for a poetry contest. A lot of that had to do with Ms. Hall and Mr. K's help. If they had told me what to write about, guaranteed I would not have placed so high up in standings, because I wouldn't have felt the same about the topic I was writing about." -Jon (in Ms. Hall's class for his grade 8 year (2013/2014).*

"Choice," is the word in our classroom, because we like to know that we have a choice in what we learn and how learn it in a way we can actually learn from! This has helped me and other students understand things in a way we can understand, because sure, if we went the more traditional way like everyone else is doing (given a topic to write about and how to write it), instead we get to choose how we want to learn and what we want to learn! And trust me when I say it, I enjoy it! This summer even though I wasn't given any assignment, I did it anyway. Because I was able to have control over what I was learning. I believe that school should be teaching you well-being, and that we should have a opportunities to have the responsibility in what we are learning because it lets me feel like I matter, and it never rushes kids to finish their work. Sure, they might need to give us a little push, but we aren't rushed, because honestly, it makes you want to do it less.

- *"My purpose as a member of the teaching profession is to describe authentic practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics and towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences in compelling ways through various writing genres and inquiries." -Jennifer Hall (teacher apart of "teaching with choice" group, for her 7th year and my teacher, who has inspired many teachers and students including myself. I am so thankful for her being my teacher, without her I wouldn't be here today.)*

- CCC-Control, Choice, Character.
  "I had my grade sixers the last couple of years writing stuff that is so much better than anything my grade 8s wrote before, and I thinks it's simply because it matters to them." - Kristen (teacher a part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 3rd year.)

This thing we and other classrooms are doing, is learning things like this. There's no teacher book on this, you can't just go to something for example a "SAGE conference," and just do it, you have to believe in yourself, as a teacher, and you have to believe in us, your students. Let us open up, and see what we are capable of, and not only can we be more engaged but to be able to understand ourselves in ways that a lot of things can.

- *"I think I've always wanted to give my kids choice, I just didn't know how. I didn't know how because I felt if I gave my students choice, it would be a free for all. Like I wouldn't know how to help because everyone would be everywhere and I wouldn't know how to be a good teacher on how to help them with that." -Lauren*

The writing and knowledge that the students gain from this is unbelievable. But most kids don't get to show their talents and sometimes teachers don't get to understand that student because sometimes a wall gets built and we can't always push through it with the traditional methods to teaching.

- *"I am mostly trying them to accomplish them to develop their own voice and just to find what they're interested in, and run with that; to enjoy reading and writing which before very few of them were and now I think they're doing it now more on their own. They want to do it." -Kari (teacher part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 1st year.)*

A lot of teachers I've talked to and with whom I would agree will tell you they think that kids think they have nothing important in their lives, nothing special. Which makes them feel unimportant. And the most teachers I think would agree, they want their students to feel they do have a meaningful life, because they do.

- *"I've learned that by giving kids the opportunities to tell their own stories, whatever stories they want, you are going to get what you want far more out of them because they are more emotionally attached to it. I've learnt that this is accessible to all kids to some degree and I've learned that for myself that I need to question things more as I go along and, to be more reflective and remind myself of keeping that bar high for my kids." -Amanda (teacher a part of "teaching with choice" group, for her 1st year and first year teaching middle school.)*

Here's the thing: this isn't just a magical rainbow made with lollipops and ice cream sundaes. There will be bumps along the way, times when you as a teacher need a break, and maybe the students too. This is more work, I will tell you that right now. For both teachers and students, mostly because it is no longer a step-by-step, write this about this book. You now have to give all these students this freedom and, trust and choice with what they are learning and give them the proper tools to do that. This is not a "tomorrow I can start," kind of a thing; it's a whole process.

I asked students how they would feel if their teacher took "writing with choice" away from them, and they answered with this:

- *"Frustrated, because I would like that that so I just wouldn't try as hard because I wouldn't care." -anonymous student*
- *"It would take me longer and make me more stressed because I wouldn't care so the piece wouldn't be that good." -anonymous student*
- *I think I would miss it if this was taken away from me." -anonymous student*

Not everyone will buy into this. A student may hate it, but you could also have students like me who write at home for fun, no assignment necessary, just me being me. To do this it may be harder to have chance, but in the end, with the kids I've talked to, we get a lot more out of it. I interviewed students in a classroom, and 75% of the class said said more choice is more challenging, but 85% of the class said it was more rewarding. Even if this doesn't work for everyone, as long as it makes someone better I think that's what matters.

- *"I have 100's of students who would attest to the fact that they feel their year(s) in my class had a lasting impact on their lives, and so many have told me, in various ways, that they can't say that about any other year of their schooling." -Syd Korsunsky*

Just think about it . . . a world where from K-12, every year you get to meet 20 or so new students, and you get to know them, like really understand them, so you as a teacher can connect with them. So that we as students have someone to talk to. These students get to learn something where we can still use in it 5-10 years, because we actually care about, we actually want to do it, and it may not always be such a struggle to go to school everyday. Imagine a world where we can make a change and help us learn life lessons we can use in life, help us become that person we have always wanted to be. To be that person inside that most of us try to hide.

- *"Educators are stuck in their conventional ways of teaching and often allowing new ideas to generate in the classroom is feared. It is easier to stick simply to old ideas and ways of knowing. In doing so, creative thought, student voice and choice can be undermined. Students must obey our prescribed lessons as much as we must adhere to the curriculum. We need to move beyond our fears and explore new ideas. As an educator, I see myself always learning alongside my students. However, I did not start out like this. I too feared the unknown and the thought of opening up a variety of topics for students to explore, with no idea of where it would go, overwhelmed me. But, with the help of my colleagues I was pushed out of my comfort zone into working alongside the students on topics I knew little about. Although it may take more effort, it is MUCH more interesting for me and my students." -Jennifer Hall*

I have been to 8 other classrooms this year and presented to over 100 different teachers. So I have seen and met my share of students; not only have I gotten to see their growth in the past year, but I have also had the opportunity to make real life connections with them. So I will stand up to this because I believe that this "different" way of learning, is a better way and I hope that people will see that and join our way learning because hear me out when I say this; this is the most fun I have ever had in school.

But don't trust me, figure it out yourself.

<div align="right">Karley</div>

Appendix B: "The Path to Achievement" by Sarah

As this year comes to a close, many students prepare to conquer high school. Larger building, complicated academics and higher work demands all contribute to the nervous element of starting high school for most students. One of those students is Claire.

Claire was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy shortly after birth. The disorder affected her physical health and abilities. However, one thing it didn't affect was her determination to lead a successful life. "A disability isn't an excuse not to live life to the fullest", she once said to her teacher.

To Claire, part of that meant getting an education and a good career. High school seems like another step toward that goal, but for Claire there was a major setback. Disabled students attend high school until they are 21 years old.

"I don't want to", she exclaimed while looking at her mom. "That would hold me back 3 years from going to university and eventually starting a career, just because I have a physical disability." "I agree, said her mom, especially when you've done the standard curriculum ever since you started school! Tell people from high school what you just told me, then see how they respond. We'll go from there." "I was already planning on doing that", agreed Claire.

Today is Claire's transition meeting, and she is more prepared than ever to voice her opinion. As people started arriving, the nerves set in for Claire. However, she knew the only way she would successfully achieve her goal was if she could get people from her future high school motivated to assist her in doing so.

Within five minutes of the meeting, Claire clearly stated her plans for the future. "My goal is to graduate in four years!" Immediately, the learning support teacher from high school, Mrs. Waters, formed a surprised look on her face. She said "you can take longer, you know!" **C'mon, this is where I have to stand up for what I believe in!** *"*I know I can, but I don't want to!" The conversation then drifted off to another topic, but not for long. "We will do the best we can to help you achieve that goal," Mrs. Waters exclaimed, but don't be disappointed if it doesn't work out." **How can she even say that to me!** "I will be disappointed!", admitted Claire, "because that's what I set out to do! If it doesn't work out, that would mean I didn't achieve my goal!" By the end of the meeting, Mrs. Waters attitude changed. For the first time, she realized Claire was serious.

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Claire is now in grade nine, and the future in terms of achieving her goal looks bright! Physical pain only allows her to attend school half time, but a few adaptations enable her to still learn all the curriculum.

Classroom and learning support teachers collaborated their knowledge and expertise to create a schedule that alternates her mandatory courses. For example, one day she'll attend math but miss science. The next day it's the opposite.

They also figured out that video and voice recording is beneficial for classes that Claire can't be at school for, especially if her physical pain keeps her from attending for any length of time. "I like using technology for those types of things," expressed Claire. "Recording the teachers voice allows me to hear the lesson, regardless of where I'm located or what time of day it is. Video programs such as Skype enable me to watch a live lesson, then ask any questions I might have for the teacher!" Both of these resources are useful to Claire. It just depends on what the lesson entails.

Since the beginning of the year, Claire has also taken correspondence courses through distance education. This program means the student can learn the appropriate academics, even if their in a different location than their teacher. It makes technology the base for communication, instead of meeting at school to talk about the assignments. Claire takes English Language Arts through correspondence because she feels that's the subject she needs the least support in. It's definitely helped her stay on top of the curriculum!

The past 4 years haven't been easy for Claire. She continued to attend school part time. This meant she'd take in all the knowledge she could, than do most assignments and projects at home. Every aspect of her life was occupied by education.

To Claire, however, it was well worth it! Today is grade 12 graduation, and she managed to achieve what some rendered impossible. "My entire life I was told that if I set my mind to something, I can accomplish it. Over the past 4 years, I put that theory to the test. Today I proved to myself that there actually is truth behind that statement!"

As Claire wheels up to accept her graduation envelope, a huge smile forms upon her face. **This is the moment I've been waiting for! I'm about to meet the goal I've worked so hard to achieve!**

During the graduation dinner, Mrs. Waters approached Claire. "Congratulations on achieving your goal", she exclaimed! "I've been waiting until today to ask you this question. What's the most important thing you've learned in the past four years?" After thinking for a minute, Claire replied. "That's difficult to answer because I've learned many things. However, to me the most important thing I've learned is that believing and achieving go hand in hand. Without achieving, belief is destroyed, but success doesn't come unless you believe you're capable of achieving your goal!"

Appendix C: "Alone" by Atavia

I step outside and immediately everything changes. I stand calmly against my deck; I notice the paint that's came off over time, which makes it look old and rustic.

I look out over the yard to the garden. It's the shape of an upside down L with dead little roots coming out everywhere . As I gaze over to the right I see an old blue barn; we don't use for anything besides firewood because really, it's too small for anything else.

To the side there are small parts of damp dark brown and green forest surrounding the yard; off in the distance is a golden-coloured field.

I see a half lit sunset right at the time when it's almost night; it's a deep purple that fades up into a orange peach color, then into a light red. It's kind of like a rainbow without green, but it doesn't really show in the sky. It's more reflected into the clouds.

And it's my favorite place to be . . . day or night.

I like to be alone here to escape the reality of the world; to not think of anything but me and my life. In a way it helps me remember things as I reflect on what matters to me.

And some things that don't.

Sometimes I think about things that aren't just for me, like my friends and how they have changed me. And changed themselves. I usually go outside because it's calm, with the fresh scent of water and trees. Or in the winter time, when the moon is out and full, with a sky filled with stars. That's when the cold winter air flows gently through my hair, yet surprisingly in that moment it doesn't bother me. In fact it makes me smile I feel my eyes light up with joy, then start to water and I almost begin to cry because of the cold.

Back in the city everything changes! It's loud busy . . . rushed. There's nowhere for me to find quiet or calm. It's sad and polluted. Most people look like they're having a bad day . . . probably because they are.

Appendix D: Choice and Voice Philosophy

<u>Two Dozen Things I Now Believe About…</u>

Writing Workshop
- All writing must have a "So What?"
- Teacher as Writer – we must write alongside our students
- There is no single "Writing Process"
- Revision is a natural consequence of meaningful, timely feedback
- Whole-class writing assignments must only be strategic (EXERCISES) – "one size does NOT fit all"
- We need to write every day – Quick Writes, Exercises: "Bad writing precedes good writing"
- We should be preparing our students for the 21st Century – not 20th
- Narrative voice is the basis of almost all genres: "The Power of "I"
- Mechanics are best addressed in the context of meaningful writing.
- Grades get in the way of effective writing, and rubrics used for grading often destroy effective writing
- All writing is (should be) "creative"
- We vastly underestimate the abilities of our students

Reading Workshop
- Teacher as Reader
- There are distinct reading strategies that can be taught at any age
- Classroom collections vs. the school library
- Interest and schema are more important than reading levels in book selection
- Reading comprehension is reading
- Browsing vs. "Someday Lists"
- "Community" of readers (book share) and multiple copies
- Summaries: when and why? ("Six Word" summary/synthesis)
- Novels vs. "others" – "just as long as they're reading"
- This is the golden age of Y.A. literature.
- Large chunks of silent reading time
- What next? or . . . *'Boy, would I ever love to do a diorama based on that book!'*

Appendix E: Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Research Ethics and Compliance

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

TO: **Jennifer Hall**   **(Advisor: Barbara McMillan)**
          Principal Investigator

FROM: **Zana Lutfiyya, Chair**
          Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2018:035 (HS21680)**
          Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

Effective: April 25, 2018   **Expiry:** April 25, 2019

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.*

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.

2. Any modification to the research must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.

3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.

4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.

5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.

6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans.*

Funded Protocols:
- **Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.**

Appendix F: School Division Superintendent: Letter of Consent

 UNIVERSITY | Faculty of Education
OF MANITOBA | Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

227 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

Principal Investigator:
Jennifer Hall
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M. Ed. Program and Thesis Advisor
Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
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This consent letter, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what students' participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask me. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Dear ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓,

My name is Jennifer Hall, and I am a grade seven/eight multi-age teacher at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ School. I am also a Master of Education student in the Education for Sustainability and Wellbeing cohort at the University of Manitoba, and that's the reason I am writing to you. I have received approval from the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the U of M for a research study to investigate how a choice and voice approach in English Language Arts impacts middle years students' agency for well-being. Throughout the last 11 years of teaching I have noticed there is not enough choice and voice for students' learning in the classroom. Moreover, there is little research connecting the notion of choice and voice with well-being. The study I have developed, *Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being*, aims to reveal an understanding of this connection, and I would like to conduct this study with my former students in the ▓▓▓▓▓▓ School Division. In the following paragraphs, I am hoping to convince you that the study is worthy of being carried out.

1. Introduction and Study Purpose

I have been implementing a choice and voice approach in reading and writing workshop for the past 7 years and would like your permission to interview students I have taught over this period as well as to use examples of students' work I have collected throughout the school years as part of my regular teaching practice. I will be requesting voluntary participation from ten students in the ▮▮▮▮▮▮ School Division whom I taught while they were in grades seven and eight. Thus, I would like to invite 2 students from each of the following grade levels: 8,9,10,11, and 12 to participate in the study. I will select these students based on their final English Language Arts marks in my Grade 8 class: one of the two students would have achieved a 4 (80-100%) and one would have achieved a 2/3 (60-80%). This will allow for a somewhat randomized, yet diverse selection of students.

Throughout the qualitative phenomenological-oriented research study I have designed, I will be trying to elicit an understanding of how each participating student personally makes sense of her/his choice and voice experiences. As such, choice for students in my classroom is the phenomenon. Participants will be asked questions related to their background, experience, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. I will be looking for evidence of the affect of the choice/voice approach on students' competence, autonomy and relatedness, which Deci & Ryan, (1991) and Ryan (1995) argue leads to enhanced personal well-being.

2. Study Procedures Including Time Commitment/Feedback/Debriefing

I am formally requesting your consent to conduct this research within your school division. Upon receiving administrative permission for the study, I will send an electronic poster to ▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮ and request that he email the poster (attached as Appendix J) in an informational email that is sent out to all families. Grades 9-12 students who are interested in being interviewed will respond to me using the email address on the poster. Once the initial communication is established, I will be in contact with the student's parents or guardians and the student. I will request that the student's parents/guardians provide the student's final ELA mark received in my Grade 8 class. I will group the students according to their final mark and then randomly select from the two categories as described above. The parental/guardian informed consent form (attached as Appendix A) and the student participant assent form (attached as Appendix B) will be hand delivered by me to the students who have been selected. Once consent and assent forms are signed, they are to be returned to me in the pre-addressed envelopes provided. Soon after, these eight student participants will be contacted by me via email for a one-on-one interview with me at a convenient time and place for both the participant and myself.

As a grade 7/8 teacher, I recognize that I am in a position of power over the two Grade 8 students who will be invited and selected to participate in this study. In order to alleviate any pressure my current Grade 8 students may feel to participate, I will ask for consent after marks are submitted and accepted by my administration on June 20th, 2018. Upon receiving administrative consent for the study, I will send an electronic poster (Appendix J) in an informational email to all eleven grade 8 families. As a result, parents or guardians and the Grade 8 students can make a decision about consenting/assenting without potentially feeling their decision may have an effect on evaluation or treatment of the student. Letters of consent/assent will be distributed to families in a sealed envelope sent through Canada Post and returned with signatures in a sealed envelope

pre-addressed to my school address. I will open the mail on the last day of school, group the students according to their final mark, and then randomly select two students from the two categories as described above. I will contact the two Grade 8 students who, with parental/guardian consent, have assented to participate in the study. I will immediately arrange a one-on-one interview (approximately 60 minutes) with each of these student participants at a convenient time and place for both the participant and me. The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions are attached as Appendix I.

I will personally transcribe each interview and return a summary to the participant for a "validity check" (approximately 60 minutes) (Hyncer, 1985, p. 291). If the summary is considered to be inaccurate by the participant, a second interview will be scheduled (approximately 30 minutes). Throughout the study, a peer will debrief with me in order to identify interpretations that may appear biased. As peer reviewer, Syd Korsunsky is knowledgeable about the topic; he has been working alongside me in the implementation of the choice and voice approach. Once I have generated the themes from the interview data, I will invite all 10 participants to participate in a focus group discussion (approximately 90 minutes). At this meeting, I will share what I believe the data are suggesting, so that they can comment on whether the themes I've identified are an accurate interpretation of their experiences.

Since I am only choosing two students from Grades 8 through 12, there may be examples of the writing and art work of students not included in the interview and focus group, that I will request permission to use in this study. After the invitational poster is sent out, students who are interested in sharing their work with me will have their parents/guardians email me. I will send a consent form (attached as Appendix C) to the student's parents/guardians and an assent form to the student (attached as Appendix D). If permission and assent are given, the signed forms will be returned to me in the pre-addressed envelopes provided.

3. Uses of Data
The time frame for this study is to begin recruitment in April 2018. I would like to be collecting data during the months of May and June. If possible, I want to finish data collection by the summer of 2018. The data will be used for my thesis. After the data have been analyzed and my thesis successfully defended, a brief one to three page summary of the research findings will be shared with you on or before July 2019.

With this choice and voice approach, I have endeavored to foster autonomy, with the aim to develop students' agency for well-being. If students feel empowered and well, I hope their classroom life will be enhanced. My larger goal is for students to become lifelong learners who find a place for reading and writing beyond the classroom. My purpose as a member of the teaching profession is to describe authentic practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences in compelling ways.

Thank you for considering my request. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me using the phone number or email address provided below. If assent is given, I have included a pre-addressed envelope for returning a copy of this signed form to me.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone (204) 996-8496
hallj@myumanitoba.ca

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding students' participation in the research project and agree to their participation. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw your consent for the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information for the duration of the study.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 and/or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent letter has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I give my permission for Jennifer Hall to conduct her thesis study, *Choice and Voice In Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being*, beginning in April, 2018 at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Middle School and ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ High School in ▮▮▮▮▮▮ School Division as partial credit for her Master's degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.

_____   _____

Signature of Superintendent   Date

Appendix G: Middle School Principal: Letter of Consent

Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

227 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
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Principal Investigator:	**M. Ed. Program and Thesis Advisor**
Jennifer Hall	Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education	282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba	University of Manitoba
Phone ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮	Phone/Voice Mail: (204) 474 9036
E-mail: hallj@myumanitoba.ca	E-mail: Barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

This consent letter, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what students' participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask me. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Dear ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮,

As you are aware I am currently working on completing my Master of Education degree in the Education for Sustainability and Wellbeing cohort within the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am conducting a research study to investigate how a choice and voice approach in English Language Arts impacts middle years students' agency for well-being. Throughout the last 11 years of teaching I have noticed there is not enough choice and voice for students' learning in classrooms. Moreover, there is little research connecting the notion of choice and voice with well-being. The research study I have designed aims to reveal an understanding of this connection. It has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, and Superintendent ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ has given his permission for the study to occur in the ▮▮▮▮▮▮ School Division.

1. Introduction and Study Purpose
I have been implementing a choice and voice approach in reading and writing workshop for the last 7 years and would like your permission to interview two of the Grade 8 students I have taught during the 2017-2018 school year. I will select these students based on their final English Language Arts marks in my Grade 8 class: one of these two students would have achieved a 4 (80-100%) and one who would have achieved a 2/3 (60-80%). Additionally, I will be asking the

principal at ████████████████ for permission to interview eight former students currently in Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 (two per grade level) using a similar selection process. This will allow for a somewhat randomized, yet diverse selection of students. I would also like permission to use examples of students' work I have collected throughout the school year as part of my regular teaching practice.

Throughout the qualitative phenomenological-oriented research study I have designed, I will be trying to elicit an understanding of how each participating student personally makes sense of her/his choice and voice experiences. As such, choice for students in my classroom is the phenomenon. Participants will be asked questions related to their background, experience, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. I will be looking for evidence of the affect of the choice/voice approach on students' competence, autonomy and relatedness, which Deci & Ryan, (1991) and Ryan (1995) argue leads to enhanced personal well-being.

2. Study Procedures Including Time Commitment/Feedback/Debriefing

As a grade 7/8 teacher at ████████████████████████, I recognize that I am in a position of power over the two Grade 8 students who will be invited and selected to participate in this study. In order to alleviate any pressure my current Grade 8 students may feel to participate, I will ask for consent after marks are submitted and accepted by you on June 20th, 2018. Upon receiving administrative consent for the study, I will send an electronic poster (Appendix J) in an informational email to all eleven grade 8 families. As a result, parents or guardians and the Grade 8 students can make a decision about consenting/assenting without potentially feeling their decision may have an effect on evaluation or treatment of the student. Letters of consent/assent (attached as Appendices A and B) will be distributed to families in a sealed envelope sent through Canada Post and returned with signatures in a sealed envelope pre-addressed to my school address. I will open these envelopes on the last day of school, group the students according to their final mark, and then randomly select two students from the two categories as described above. I will contact the two Grade 8 students who, with parental/guardian consent, have assented to participate in the study. I will immediately arrange a 60 minute one-on-one interview with each of these student participants at a convenient time and place for both the participant and me. The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions are attached as Appendix I.

Participants will be asked questions related to their background, experience, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. I will be looking for evidence of the affect of the choice/voice approach on students' competency, autonomy and sense of relatedness through their work and what they say through the interviews. I will transcribe each interview and return a summary to the participant for a "validity check" (approximately 60 minutes) (Hyncer, 1985, p. 291). If the summary is considered to be inaccurate by the participant, a second interview (approximately 30 minutes) will take place. Throughout the study, a peer will debrief with me in order to identify interpretations that may appear biased. As peer reviewer, Syd Korsunsky is knowledgeable about the topic; he has been working alongside me in the implementation of the choice and voice approach. Once I have generated the themes from the interview data, I will invite all 10 participants to participate in a focus group discussion (approximately 90 minutes). At this meeting, I will share what I believe the data are suggesting, so that they can comment on whether the themes I've identified are an accurate interpretation of their experiences.

Since I am only choosing two students from Grades 8-12, there may be examples of the writing and art work of students not included in the interviews, that I will request permission to use in this study. After the invitational poster is sent out, students who are interested in sharing their work with me will have their parents/guardians email me. I will send a consent form (Appendix C) to the student's parents/guardians and an assent form to the student (Appendix D). If you decide to allow students participation in this study, please read through the consent and assent forms for additional information.

3. Uses of Data
The time frame for this study is to begin recruitment at the end of June 2018. I would like to begin collecting data from my Grade 8 students during July 2018. If possible, I want to finish data collection in the summer of 2018. After the data has been analyzed, and my thesis successfully defended, a brief one to three page summary of the research findings will be shared with you on or before July 2019.

With this choice and voice approach, I have endeavored to foster autonomy, with the aim of developing students' agency for well-being. If students feel empowered and well, I hope their classroom life will be enhanced. My larger goal is for students to become lifelong learners who find a place for reading and writing beyond the classroom. My purpose as a member of the teaching profession is to describe authentic practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences in compelling ways.

Thank you for considering my request. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me using the phone number or email address provided below. If assent is given, I have included a pre-addressed envelope for returning a copy of this signed form to me.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone (204) 996-8496
hallj@myumanitoba.ca

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding students' participation in the research project and agree to their participation. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw your consent for the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information for the duration of the study.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is

being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 and/or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent letter has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I give my permission for Jennifer Hall to conduct her thesis study, *Choice and Voice In Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being*, beginning in June, 2018 at ███████████ Middle School in ██████████ School Division as partial credit for her Masters' degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.

_____   _____

Signature of Administrator   Date

Appendix H: High School Principal: Letter of Consent

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

227 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Principal Investigator:
Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone ███████████
E-mail: hallj@myumanitoba.ca

M. Ed. Program and Thesis Advisor
Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone/Voice Mail: (204) 474 9036
E-mail: Barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

This consent letter, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what students' participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask me. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Dear ███████████,

My name is Jennifer Hall, and I am a grade seven/eight multi-age teacher at ███████████ ██████. I am also a Master of Education student in the Education for Sustainability and Wellbeing cohort at the University of Manitoba, and that's the reason I am writing to you. I am conducting a research study to investigate how a choice and voice approach in English Language Arts impacts middle years students' agency for well-being. Throughout the last 11 years of teaching I have noticed there is not enough choice and voice for students' learning in classrooms. Moreover, there is little research connecting the notion of choice and voice with well-being. The research study I have designed aims to reveal an understanding of this connection. It has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, and Superintendent ███████████ has given his permission for the study to occur in the ████ ██████ School Division.

1. Introduction and Study Purpose
I have been implementing a choice and voice approach in reading and writing workshop for the last 7 years and would like your permission to interview students I have taught over this period as well as to use examples of students' work I have collected throughout the school years as part of my regular teaching practice. I am requesting voluntary participation from students at your

school who I taught in grades seven and eight. I would like to interview 2 students from each of the following grade levels: 9,10,11, and 12. I will select these students based on their final English Language Arts marks in my Grade 8 class: one of these two students would have achieved a 4 (80-100%) and one would have achieved a 2/3 (60-80%). Additionally, I will be asking the principal at ███████████████ for permission to interview two students I taught in my Grade 8 class this year, using a similar selection process. This will allow for a somewhat randomized, yet diverse selection of students.

Throughout the qualitative phenomenological-oriented research study I have designed, I will be trying to elicit an understanding of how each participating student personally makes sense of her/his choice and voice experiences. As such, choice for students in my classroom is the phenomenon. Participants will be asked questions related to their background, experience, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. I will be looking for evidence of the affect of the choice/voice approach on students' competence, autonomy and relatedness, which Deci & Ryan, (1991) and Ryan (1995) argue leads to enhanced personal well-being.

2. Study Procedures Including Time Commitment/Feedback/Debriefing
I am formally requesting your assent to conduct this research within your school. Upon receiving your permission, I will send you an electronic poster and request that you email the poster (attached as Appendix J) in an informational email that is sent out to all families. Grades 9-12 students who are interested in being interviewed will respond to me using the email address on the poster. Once the initial communication is established, I will be in contact with the student's parents or guardians and the student. I will request that the student's parents/guardians provide the student's final ELA mark received in my Grade 8 class. I will group the students according to their final mark and then randomly select from the two categories as described above. The parental/guardian informed consent form (attached as Appendix A) and the student participant assent form (attached as Appendix B) will be hand delivered by me to the students who have been selected. Once consent and assent forms are signed, they are to be returned in a sealed envelope pre-addressed to my school address. Soon after, these eight student participants will be contacted by me via email for a 60 minute one-on-one interview with me at a convenient time and place for both the participant and myself. The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions are attached as Appendix I.

Participants will be asked questions related to their background, experience, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. I will be looking for evidence of the affect of the choice/voice approach on students' competency, autonomy and sense of relatedness through their work and what they say through the interviews. I will transcribe each interview and return a summary to the participant for a "validity check" (approximately 60 minutes) (Hyncer, 1985, p. 291). If the summary is considered to be inaccurate by the participant, a second interview (approximately 30 minutes) will take place. Throughout the study, a peer will debrief with me in order to identify interpretations that may appear biased. As peer reviewer, Syd Korsunsky is knowledgeable about the topic; he has been working alongside me in the implementation of the choice and voice approach. Once I have generated the themes from the interview data, I will invite all 10 participants to participate in a focus group discussion (approximately 90 minutes). At this meeting, I will share what I believe the data are suggesting, so that they can comment on whether the themes I've identified are an accurate interpretation of their experiences.

Since I am only choosing two students from Grades 8-12, there may be examples of the writing and art work of students not included in the interviews, that I will request permission to use in this study. After the invitational poster is sent out, students who are interested in sharing their work with me will have their parents/guardians email me. I will send a consent form (Appendix C) to the student's parents/guardians and an assent form to the student (Appendix D). If you decide to allow students participation in this study, please read through the consent and assent forms for additional information.

3. Uses of Data

The time frame for this study is to begin recruitment in April 2018. I would like to be collecting data during the months of May, and June. If possible, I want to finish data collection by the summer of 2018. After the data have been analyzed and my thesis successfully defended, a brief one to three page summary of the research findings will be shared with you on or before July 2019.

With this choice and voice approach, I have endeavoured to foster autonomy, with the aim of developing students' agency for well-being. If students feel empowered and well, I hope their classroom life will be enhanced. My larger goal is for students to become lifelong learners who find a place for reading and writing beyond the classroom. My purpose as a member of the teaching profession is to describe authentic practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences in compelling ways.

Thank you for considering my request. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me using the phone number or email address provided below. If assent is given, I have included a pre-addressed envelope for returning a copy of this signed form to me.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone (204) 996-8496
hallj@myumanitoba.ca

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding students' participation in the research project and agree to their participation. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw your consent for the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information for the duration of the study.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is

being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 and/or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent letter has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I give my permission for Jennifer Hall to conduct her thesis study, *Choice and Voice In Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being*, beginning in April, 2018 at ███████████ ███████ in ██████████ School Division as partial credit for her Masters' degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.

_____   _____

Signature of Administrator   Date

Appendix I: Poster

UNIVERSITY | Faculty of Education
OF **MANITOBA** | Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Choice and Voice in Middle School

Were you a student in Jennifer Hall's Grade 7/8 class at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮?

Would you like to share your experiences of a choice and voice approach in Reading and Writing Workshop?

My name is Jennifer Hall and I am a Master of Education student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I would like to invite ten students from Grades 8-12 to be part of a research study that explores how a choice and voice approach impacts a sense of well-being. I will select students based on their final English Language Arts marks in my Grade 8 class ranging from 60-100%.

This research project will involve an interview AND/OR sharing of your work (writing samples and reflections) that reveals where you had choice. At the end of the interviews, I will ask all ten students to a focus group interview to share what I have interpreted. The total time involved is approximately 3-4 hours. I will publish the findings in my thesis.

Confidentiality will be strictly maintained in this research study. This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, humanethics@umanitoba.ca. If interested in being interviewed, in sharing your work, or in both, please discuss this opportunity with your parents/guardians and ask them to contact me by email at hallj@myumanitoba.ca to learn additional details and ask questions. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.

Researcher: Jennifer Hall
University of Manitoba,
Faculty of Education
hallj@myumanitoba.ca
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Advisor: Barbara McMillan, Ph.D.
University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education
barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

Appendix J: Informed Consent Form (Parent/Guardian)

Faculty of Education Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning	227 Education Building University of Manitoba Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3T 2N2 Telephone (204) 474-9014 Fax (204) 474-7550

Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

Principal Investigator:
Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone ████████████
E-mail: hallj@myumanitoba.ca

M. Ed. Program and Thesis Advisor
Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone/Voice Mail: (204) 474 9036
E-mail: Barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

Dear (parent/guardian),

Your child was a student in my Grade 7/8 class at ████████████████. I am writing to request your permission for your child to participate in a study related to the choice and voice approach I implemented in reading and writing workshop. I'm interested in looking at the relationship of this approach to their agency for well-being, which I am defining as showing competence, autonomy and relatedness to others. The study has been approved by ████████ Superintendent of ████████ School Division, the principal of your child's school, and the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, where I am completing a Masters of Education degree. In order for your child to become a participant in the study, it is necessary for you to read the consent form that follows, to understand what your child is being asked to do as a participant and the time required of your child, and to indicate those aspects of the study for which you give consent. Your signature on the final page of the consent form indicates that you are granting permission for your child to participate in the study "Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being". If you consent for your child's participation, please have them fill in the assent form included in this envelope.

Consent Form

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your child's participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask me. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

1. Introduction and Study Purpose

The research project investigates how a choice and voice approach in reading and writing workshop instruction impacts middle years students' agency for well-being. The goal is to foster autonomy and for students to become lifelong learners who find a place for reading and writing beyond the classroom. The research describes authentic practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences in compelling ways. Outcomes from the research will be shared in academic publications, conferences and classroom use. Any questions you may have about the study can be directed to me using the contact information above.

2. Study Procedures Including Feedback/Debriefing
Your child will be asked to participate in a one-on-one **interview** with me that will take approximately 60 minutes. She/he will be asked a series of questions in order to describe how participation in choice-based experiences has impacted her/his agency for well-being. I will summarize each interview and return my summary to your child to check if my interpretation is accurate. The **review of the transcript** material may take up to 60 minutes. A **second interview of approximately 30 minutes** may take place, if considered if your child disagrees with portions of the summary. Throughout the study, a peer will debrief with me in order to identify interpretations that may appear biased. At the end of the interviews, all students participating in the study will be invited to partake in a 90 minute **focus group** discussion where I will share the themes I've generated from the interviews. Students can comment on whether the themes constructed accurately represent their experiences.

Your child will be asked for permission to use writing samples and term reflections that reveal where s/he had choice, how s/he demonstrated agency/well-being and reflected her/his perspective. Your child will have the opportunity to review specific pieces of writing I will be using in my study during the interview process.

The interview will occur at a time and location that is convenient for the student and me. With your permission and your child's assent, I will record this interview with a digital audio recording device and write observation notes in a journal. If a second clarifying interview with a participant is considered necessary, an identical process will be used. As with the interviews, a time and location of the focus group will be convenient for all participants and me, and permission will be requested for digitally audio recording the discussion and my note taking in my research journal. After the data has been collected, analyzed, and my thesis successfully defended, a brief one to three page summary of the research findings will be shared with the participants in July 2019.

3. Potential Risks and Benefits
The risks to your child in the study are no greater than what she/he would experience in daily life. The risk to taking part in a study are greater if the participants are identified. Researchers are required to keep the identity of their participants confidential by making it non-identifiable unless specific consent is received.

During the interview and focus group, your child will reflect on his/her experiences and gain a self-understanding of how having choice impacts his/her agency for well-being. Participating in this research provides the opportunity to revisit moments from the past, which may be personally fulfilling and build self-confidence.

Your child's participation in this study will help build an understanding of how she/he experienced choice and the impact it had. When others read the study, they would see how participants' contributions may help expand this choice-based approach to other classrooms. Taking part in this study will not affect your child's grades.

4. Deception
There is no deception involved in this study. I am interested in your child's honest response to the interview and focus group questions. As mentioned earlier, these questions focus on your child's experiences in the choice and voice approach I implemented in reading and writing workshop.

5. Anonymity and Confidentiality
Your child will be known to me, my advisor and my peer reviewer. As peer reviewer, Syd Korsunsky is knowledgeable about the topic as he has been working alongside me in the implementation of the choice and voice approach. He will discuss the process of the study with me and assess whether my interpretations and findings are accurate. All precautions will be taken to protect his/her identity in the study if this is your and your child's wish. There are several options for the level of confidentiality, please select the one you and your child are most comfortable.

☐   I consent to my child's name being used in the research, in presentations and publications
☐   I consent to the use of a pseudonym for my child. (If your child wishes to use a specific pseudonym please write it in the blank, otherwise I will invent a pseudonym for her/him.)
_____
☐   I do not provide consent for my child to be referred to in the research in any direct or identifying manner.

All physical data from the study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. All digital data from the study will be stored on my personal password-protected computer. A digital backup will be made on a password protected external drive stored separately from the consent forms in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only my peer reviewer, my advisor, and I will have access to the data. My advisor will have access to the identifiable data in this study, as per the advisor-student agreement. Once the study is complete, participants confidentiality will continue to be protected. All data generated during the study will be securely stored for 5 years following my successful thesis and then destroyed by deletion or secure shredding in July 2024.

6a. Digital Audio Recording of the Interviews and Focus Group
With your consent, the interview with your child and the focus group discussion will be audiotaped with a digital audio recorder. Please select one of the following:
☐   I do consent to my child being digitally audio recorded
☐   I do not consent to my child being digitally audio recorded

6b. Incorporating Excerpts of Interviews and the Focus Group in My M. Ed. Thesis. If you consent to your child's interview or interviews and the focus group discussion being audiotaped with a digital audio recorder, I am asking for you permission to use what your child has said as part of my Master of Education thesis. Please select one of the following:

☐ I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the interview as part of her Master of Education thesis.

☐ I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the interview as part of her Master of Education thesis.

☐ I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the focus group as part of her Master of Education thesis.

☐ I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the focus group as part of her Master of Education thesis.

6c. Incorporating Transcribed Excerpts of Interviews and the Focus Group in Dissemination of Research Study. If you consent to your child's interview or interviews and the focus group discussion being audiotaped with a digital audio recorder, I am asking for your permission to use what your child has said as part of the dissemination of the research study (for example in conference presentations, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of the following:

☐ I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the interview as part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐ I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the interview as part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐ I do   consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the focus group as part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐ I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (direct quotations) in the focus group as part of the dissemination of the research study.

6d. Incorporating Audio Excerpts of Interviews and the Focus Group in the Dissemination of the Research Study. If you consent to your child's interview or interviews and the focus group discussion being audiotaped with a digital audio recorder, I am asking for your permission to use audio segments of what your child has said as part of the dissemination of the research study (for example in conference presentations, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of the following:

☐ I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (audio segments) in the interview as part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐ I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (audio segments) in the interview as part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐ I do   consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (audio segments) in the focus group as part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐ I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what my child has said (audio segments) in the focus group as part of the dissemination of the research study.

6e. Incorporating Samples of Student's Work in My M. Ed. Thesis and in the Dissemination of My Research Results. With your consent, I would like to incorporate samples of your child's writing and art work in my thesis and in the dissemination of the results of the

research study (in conference presentations, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of the following:

- ☐ I consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work in her Master of Education thesis.
- ☐ I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work in her Master of Education thesis.
- ☐ I consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work in the dissemination of the results of her research study
- ☐ I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work for the dissemination of the results of her research study.

7. Compensation
I am unable to provide monetary compensation for your child's participation in the study. There will be beverages and snacks provided during the interviews and focus group discussion.

8. Withdrawal Procedure
At any point in the study your child is free to withdraw or in any way amend consent with no negative consequences by contacting me at the email address or phone number provided on the first page of this consent form. All data will either be modified accordingly or destroyed. If findings have been shared prior to withdrawal or amendment, removal or amendment will be made before all subsequent sharing.

9. Dissemination of Study Results
I will publish my findings in my thesis. The research results may be shared through a variety of modes such as: conferences, academic publications, and classroom use. A brief (1-3 pages) summary of results will be provided to you if requested on at the bottom of the following page of this consent form.

10. Participant Consent and Signature:

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding your child's participation in the research project and agree to your child's participation. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 and/or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Your Child's Name: _____

Your Signature _____   Date_____

Researcher Signature _____   Date _____

To receive a summary of the results of this study, please write your name, mailing address and email address below:

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Appendix K: Participant Assent

	Faculty of Education	227 Education Building
	Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning	University of Manitoba

UNIVERSITY ᴏꜰ MANITOBA | Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

227 Education Building
University of Manitoba
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Telephone (204) 474-9014
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Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

Principal Investigator:
Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇
E-mail: hallj@myumanitoba.ca

M. Ed. Program and Thesis Advisor
Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone/Voice Mail: (204) 474 9036
E-mail: Barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

Dear (student),

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study related to the choice and voice approach I implemented while you were in my Grade 7/8 class at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇. I'm interested in looking at the relationship of this approach to your agency for well-being. By "agency for well-being", I mean your realization that you have the ability to do something effectively, that your activities have been and perhaps continue to be self-directed, and that you feel connected to others. In order to participate in this study, you must first have your parent's or guardian's permission to participate. This letter gives you an idea what I am researching as a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. It's important that you read this entire letter and consent form carefully. The consent form tells you what you will be asked to do as a participant and the time participation will require. You are also asked to indicate how you would like to be identified in the study, if you give permission for audio recording our interview and the focus group discussion, and how you would like your responses to be used in my thesis and shared in academic conferences, publications, and workshops. During the interview, I will also have samples of your work that you can chose to include or not include in my thesis and share in conference presentations, publications, and workshops.

The study has been approved by ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇, Superintendent of ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ School Division, the principal of your school, and the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, where I am completing a Masters of Education degree. The goal of the research is to give you a voice in sharing your experiences. The research will describe practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences and interests.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. This will occur at a time and location that is convenient for you and me. You will be

asked a series of open-ended questions in order to describe how participation in choice-based experiences has impacted your agency for well-being. I will summarize your **interview** and return my summary to you to determine if my interpretation is accurate. This may take up to 60 minutes to review. A **second 30 minute interview** may take place, if you think my interpretation is inaccurate. Throughout the study, a peer will debrief with me in order to identify interpretations that may appear biased. At the end of the interviews, you will be invited to participate in a **focus group** discussion (approximately 90 minutes) with all other student participants in the study. During the focus group, I will share the themes I've generated from the interviews. You and the other participating students will be asked to comment on whether the themes constructed are accurate. As with the interviews, a time and location of the focus group will be convenient for all participants and me. With your permission, I will record the interview(s) and focus group discussion with a digital audio recording device and write observation notes in a journal.

I will be asking for permission to use writing samples and term reflections that reveal where you had choice, how you demonstrated agency/well-being and reflected your perspective. During the interview, you will have the opportunity to review specific pieces of writing I would like to use in my study and agree or disagree to their use. After the data has been collected, analyzed, and my thesis successfully defended, a brief one to three page summary of the research findings will be shared with you by July 2019.

Throughout the interviews, you will reflect on your experiences and gain a self-understanding of how having choice impacts your agency for well-being. Participating in this research provides the opportunity to revisit moments from the past, which may be personally fulfilling and build self-confidence. Your participation in this study will help build an understanding of how you experienced choice and the impact it had on you. When others read the study, they would see how such a choice and voice approach could work in their own classroom. Thus, your contribution may help expand this approach to other classrooms. I am unable to pay you for your participation in the study. There will, however, be beverages and snacks provided during the interviews and focus group.

I want you to know that I will not be telling your teachers, parents or any other students what you say or write. Only me, my supervisor and peer reviewer will be able to listen to or read the information you provide. A report will be written and may be presented at conferences and workshops or published in a journal. Even so, no one will know who the names of any students in the study are without a student having given permission to use her or his legal name. Taking part in this study will not affect your grades.

Anonymity and Confidentiality
You will be known to me, my advisor and my peer reviewer. As peer reviewer, Syd Korsunsky is knowledgeable about the topic and will discuss the process of the study with me and assess whether my interpretations and findings are accurate. The risk to taking part in a study are greater if the participants are identified. Researchers are required to keep the identity of their participants confidential by making it non-identifiable unless specific consent is received.

There are several options for the level of confidentiality, please select the one you are most comfortable.

☐   I consent to my name being used in the research, in presentations and publications
☐   I consent to the use of a pseudonym (If you wish to use a specific pseudonym please
     write it in the blank, otherwise one will be invented.) _____
☐   I do not provide consent to be referred to in the research in any direct or identifying
     manner.

All physical data from the study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. All digital data from the study will be stored on my personal password-protected computer. A digital backup will be made on a password protected external drive stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only my peer reviewer, my advisor, and I will have access to the data. My advisor will have access to the identifiable data in this study, as per the advisor-student agreement. Once the study is complete, your confidentiality will continue to be protected. All data generated during the study will be securely stored for 5 years following my successful thesis and then destroyed in July 2024.

Digital Audio Recording of the interviews and Focus Group
With your consent, the interview and the focus group discussion will be audiotaped with a digital audio recorder. Please select one of the following:
☐   I do consent to being digitally audio recorded
☐   I do not consent to being digitally audio recorded

Incorporating Excerpts of Interviews and the Focus Group in My M. Ed. Thesis: If you consent to the interview or interviews and the focus group discussion being audiotaped with a digital audio recorder, I am asking for your permission to use what you have said as part of my Master of Education thesis. Please select one of the following:
☐   I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the interview as part
     of her Master of Education thesis.
☐   I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the interview as
     part of her Master of Education thesis.
☐   I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the focus group as
     part of her Master of Education thesis.
☐   I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the focus group
     as part of her Master of Education thesis.

Incorporating Transcribed Excerpts of Interviews and the Focus Group in Dissemination of Research Study. If you consent to your interview or interviews and the focus group discussion being audiotaped with a digital audio recorder, I am asking for your permission to use what you have said as part of the dissemination of the research study (for example in conference presentations, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of the following:
☐   I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the interview as part
     of the dissemination of the research study.
☐   I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the interview as
     part of the dissemination of the research study.
☐   I do   consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the focus group as
     part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐   I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (direct quotations) in the focus group
     as part of the dissemination of the research study.

**Incorporating Audio Excerpts of Interviews and the Focus Group in the Dissemination of
the Research Study.** If you consent to your interview or interviews and the focus group
discussion being audiotaped with a digital audio recorder, I am asking for your permission to use
audio segments of what you said as part of the dissemination of the research study (for example
in conference presentations, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of the
following:

☐   I do consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (audio segments) in the interview as part
     of the dissemination of the research study.

☐   I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (audio segments) in the interview as
     part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐   I do   consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (audio segments) in the focus group as
     part of the dissemination of the research study.

☐   I do not   consent to Jennifer Hall using what I said (audio segments) in the focus group
     as part of the dissemination of the research study.

**5d. Incorporating Samples of Student's Work in My M. Ed. Thesis and in the
Dissemination of My Research Results.** With your consent, I would like to incorporate samples
of your writing and art work in my thesis and in the dissemination of the results of the research
study (in conference presentations, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of
the following:

☐   I consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing and art work in her Master of Education
     thesis.

☐   I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing and art work in her Master of
     Education thesis.

☐   I consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing and art work in the dissemination of the
     results of her research study

☐   I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing and art work for the dissemination of
     the results of her research study.

**Your parent/guardian have said that you are allowed to be in this study. Would you like to
participate? If you say 'no', that is OKAY. If you start the study and then decide you don't
want to do it anymore, that's OKAY too! All you have to do is contact me by email or
phone. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. I would be happy to answer them.**

If you would like to participate, please print and sign your name on the lines below:

Name (please print): _____

Signature _____

Date_____

Researcher Signature _____   Date _____

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 and/or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix L: Parent/Guardian Informed Consent Form for Using Student Work Only as Data

	Faculty of Education	227 Education Building
	Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning	University of Manitoba

227 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

Principal Investigator:
Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone ████████████
E-mail: hallj@myumanitoba.ca

M. Ed. Program and Thesis Advisor
Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone/Voice Mail: (204) 474 9036
E-mail: Barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

Dear (parent/guardian),

Your child was in my Grade 7/8 class at ████████████████. I am writing to request your permission for your child to participate in a study related to the choice and voice approach I implemented in reading and writing workshop. I'm interested in looking at the relationship of this approach on their agency for well-being which I am defining as showing competence, autonomy and relatedness to others. The study has been approved by █████████, Superintendent of ██████████ School Division, the principal of your child's school, and the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, where I am completing a Master of Education degree. Below you will find a consent form required by the Research Ethics Boards at the University of Manitoba. If you consent for your child's participation, please have them fill in the assent form included in this envelope.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

1. Introduction and Study Purpose
The research project investigates how a choice and voice approach in reading and writing workshop instruction impacts middle years students' agency for well-being. The goal is to foster autonomy and for students to become lifelong learners who find a place for reading and writing

beyond the classroom. The research describes authentic practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences in compelling ways. Outcomes from the research will be shared in academic publications, conferences and classroom use. Any questions or concerns should be directed to Jennifer Hall.

2. Study Procedures
Your child will be asked for permission to use writing samples and term reflections that reveal where she/he had choice, how she/he demonstrated agency/well-being and reflected her/his perspective. Your child will have the opportunity to review specific pieces of writing I will be using in my study. After my thesis has been successfully defended, a brief one to three page summary of the research findings will be shared with you and participating students in July 2019.

3. Potential Risks and Benefits
The risks to your child in the study are no greater than what she/he would experience in daily life. The risk to taking part in a study are greater if the participants are identified. Researchers are required to keep the identity of their participants confidential by making it non-identifiable unless specific consent is received.

Your child's participation in this research provides her/him with the opportunity to revisit moments from the past, which may be personally fulfilling and build self-confidence. Your child may experience the benefit of becoming more aware of her/his own ability to make choices and to understand the impact of these choices on her/his well-being. When others read the study, they would see how your child's contribution may help expand this choice based approach to other classrooms. Taking part in this study will not affect your child's grades.

4. Anonymity and Confidentiality
Your child is known to me, my advisor and a peer reviewer. As peer reviewer, Syd Korsunsky is knowledgeable about the topic and will discuss the process of the study with me and assess whether my interpretations and findings are accurate. All precautions will be taken to protect his/her identity in the study if this is your and your child's wish. There are several options for the level of confidentiality, please select the one you and your child are most comfortable.

☐ I consent to my child's name being used in the research, in presentations and publications
☐ I consent to the use of a pseudonym for my child. (If your child wishes to use a specific pseudonym please write it in the blank below, otherwise one will be invented.)

_____

☐ I do not provide consent for my child to be referred to in the research in any direct or identifying manner.

All physical data from the study, including samples of your child's work and signed consent forms, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only my peer reviewer, my advisor, and I will have access to the data. My advisor will have access to the identifiable data in this study, as per the advisor-student agreement. Once the study is complete, participants confidentiality will continue to be protected. All data generated during the study will be securely stored for 5 years following my successful thesis and then destroyed in July 2024.

5. Incorporating Samples of Student's Work in My M. Ed. Thesis and in the Dissemination of My Research Results. With your consent, I would like to incorporate samples of your child's writing and art work in my thesis and in the dissemination of the results of the research study (in conference presentations, journal articles, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of the following:

☐ I consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work in her Master of Education thesis.

☐ I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work in her Master of Education thesis.

☐ I consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work in the dissemination of the results of her research study

☐ I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my child's writing and art work for the dissemination of the results of her research study.

6. Risks
The risks to your child are no greater than what s/he would experience in daily life.

7. Compensation
I am unable to provide monetary compensation for your decision and your child's decision to permit me to use samples of her/his work in my Master of Education thesis and in the dissemination of the results of the study in conference presentations, journal articles, workshops, and my teaching.

8. Withdrawal Procedure
At any point in the study your child is free to withdraw or in any way amend consent to use their writing with no negative consequence. She/He is asked to contact me by email or phone to express their desire to withdraw specific pieces of writing or all pieces for which assent was initially given. If writing samples have been shared prior to withdrawal or amendment, removal or amendment will be made before all subsequent sharing.

9. Study Results
I will publish my findings in my thesis. The research results of this research study may be shared through a variety of modes such as conferences, academic publications, and classroom use. A brief (1-3 pages) summary of results will be provided to you if requested on at the bottom of the following page of this consent form.

10. Participant Consent and Signature:
Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding your child's participation in the research project and agree to your child's participation. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice or consequence. Your child's continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout his/her participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is

being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 and/or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Your Child's Name: _____

Your Signature _____   Date_____

Researcher Signature _____   Date _____

To receive a summary of the results of this study, please write your name, mailing address and email address below:

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Appendix M: Participant Assent for Using Student Work Only as Data

UNIVERSITY ᴏꜰ MANITOBA | Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

227 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

Principal Investigator:
Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
E-mail: hallj@myumanitoba.ca

M. Ed. Program and Thesis Advisor
Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone/Voice Mail: (204) 474 9036
E-mail: Barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

Dear _____, (student)

I am writing to request your permission to participate in a study related to the choice and voice approach I implemented while you were in my Grade 7/8 class at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. I'm interested in looking at the relationship of this approach to your agency for well-being. By "agency for well-being", I mean your realization that you have the ability to do something effectively, that your activities have been and perhaps continue to be self-directed, and that you feel connected to others. The study has been approved by ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, Superintendent of ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School Division, the principal of your school, and the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, where I am completing a Master of Education degree. Below you will find a consent form required by the Research Ethics Boards at the University of Manitoba.

This letter will give you an idea about what I am researching and how you can help. If you have any questions, please ask me and I would be happy to answer them. Please read this letter and consent form carefully.

I am doing a research project about how a choice and voice approach in reading and writing workshop impacts middle years students' agency for well-being. The goal of the research is to give you a voice in sharing your experiences. The research will describe practices that will allow other teachers to go beyond the basics towards meaningful literacy exercises where students share their life experiences. Outcomes from the research will be shared in academic publications, conferences and classroom use.

I am asking for your permission to use pieces of your writing and term reflections that reveal where you had choice, how you demonstrated agency/well-being and reflected your perspective. You will have the opportunity to review specific pieces of writing I will be using in my study. After my thesis successfully defended, a brief one to three page summary of the research findings will be shared with you in July 2019.

Participating in this research provides the opportunity to revisit moments from the past, which may be personally fulfilling and build self-confidence. Your participation in this study will help build an understanding of how you experienced choice and the impact it had on you. When others read the study, they would see how it could work in their own classroom. Thus, your contribution may help expand this choice based approach to other classrooms. I am unable to pay you for your participation in the study.

I want you to know that only my supervisor and a peer reviewer will be able to read the information you provide to me. A report of the results of the research study will be developed and may be presented at an education conference or published in a journal. But no one will know who the names of any students in the study unless they have given me permission to use their legal name. Taking part in this study will not affect your grades.

 Anonymity and Confidentiality
You will be known to me, my advisor and the peer reviewer. As peer reviewer, Syd Korsunsky is knowledgeable about the topic and will discuss the process of the study with me and assess whether my interpretations and findings are accurate. The risks to you in the study are no greater than what you would experience in daily life. The risk to taking part in a study are greater if the participants are identified. Researchers are required to keep the identity of their participants confidential by making it non-identifiable unless specific consent is received.

There are several options for the level of confidentiality, please select the one you are most comfortable.

  ☐ I consent to my name being used in the research, in presentations and publications
  ☐ I consent to the use of a pseudonym (If you wish to use a specific pseudonym please write it in the blank below, otherwise one will be invented.)
     _____
  ☐ I do not provide consent to be referred to in the research in any direct or identifying manner.

All physical data from the study, including samples of your work and the consent forms, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only my peer reviewer, my advisor, and I will have access to this data. My advisor will have access to the identifiable data in this study, as per the advisor-student agreement. Once the study is complete, your confidentiality will continue to be protected. All data generated during the study will be securely stored for 5 years following my successful thesis and then destroyed in July 2024.

Incorporating Samples of Student's Work in My M. Ed. Thesis and in the Dissemination of My Research Results. With your consent, I would like to incorporate samples of your writing in my thesis and in the dissemination of the results of the research study (in conference

presentations, journal articles, workshops, and my classroom teaching). Please select one of the following:

☐   I consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing in her Master of Education thesis.
☐   I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing in her Master of Education thesis.
☐   I consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing in the dissemination of the results of her research study
☐   I do not consent to Jennifer Hall using my writing for the dissemination of the results of her research study.

Your parent/guardian have said that you are allowed to be in this study. Would you like to participate by sharing your writing? If you say 'no', that is OKAY. If you start the study and then decide you don't want to do it anymore, that's OKAY too! You can ask questions at any time, now or later. I would be happy to answer them.

If you would like to participate by sharing your writing with me, please sign your name on the line below:

Name (please print): _____

Signature _____

Date_____

Researcher Signature _____   Date _____

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 and/or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix N: Interview Questions

Background questions:
- What grade are you currently in?
- How many years were you a student in my class?

Choice based learning experiences:
- How would you describe your experience in reading and writing workshop at the time you were in my class?
- Which inquiry projects did you find the most/least interesting and why?
- What did you learn throughout these projects?
- How did these activities impact your ability to make choices?
- How did your experience learning in and through this project compare to other learning experiences in ELA?
- Of the activities in which you participated, please tell me those that were most meaningful to you and why?

Impact of choice and voice on student agency for well-being:
Competence questions:
- How did these activities impact your ability to do something effectively or successfully? What helped you feel successful (feedback, communication, etc?)
Autonomy questions:
- How did these activities impact your sense of independence? OR Did you experience your behavior as self-determined? (choice/interests, acknowledgement of feelings, opportunities for self-direction)
Relatedness questions:
- How did these activities impact your sense of feeling connected to others?
Engagement questions:
- During the activities how would you describe your attention? How hard you worked? How you tried to learn? Your enjoyment?
- Did these inquiries take you out into the community to take action? Did they cause you to act differently in the world?

Opinion of the approach:
- What are your opinions regarding the choice based approach?
- *Was it more/less difficult that a more traditional approach?
- What were the ups/downs of the choice based approach for you?

Do you have anything else in which you would like to add to this interview?

Appendix O: Focus Group Questions

In the original Protocol #E2018:035 (HS21680), the fifteen middle and high school students interviewed gave assent/consent to participate in a focus group discussion. I now hope to bring all 15 students that I interviewed together into a focus group. We will be meeting at ██████ ████████████ in the conference room. I am sharing the themes that have arisen from the synthesis of the interview data. I will be sharing the themes on a PowerPoint, which will take approximately 10 minutes. This will be followed with a discussion of the themes, open-ended questions discussed by the participants, and an exit slip question (approximately 50 minutes). See questions below and the attached PowerPoint.

Script for focus group questions:

I have now shared with you my interpretations of what you said during the interviews and I would like to know: were the themes I constructed accurate with respect to your experiences with the choice and voice approach?

I am now going to ask you all some follow up questions about these themes. Your responses are being audio-recorded, for which you have given consent as you did for the individual interviews. These questions will help support and clarify what I found in the first round of interviews. Please be open to sharing your ideas, but I would appreciate it if you didn't talk over someone else as it will be easier to transcribe one voice at a time.

Relatedness:
- What did you learn about your classmates when they shared books that were important to them?
- Do you feel listening to your classmates talk about the books they read changed how you thought about them?

Autonomy:
- In the beginning you all mentioned that the choice and voice approach was challenging. What helped you move from feeling "this is difficult" to "I can do this!"

Competence:
- What specifically did you think helped you become a stronger reader, writer and thinker?

Agency:
Many of you expressed agency in terms of in the classroom (open-mindedness, empathy) and in the community based on your experiences with the choice and voice approach.

- In thinking about your behaviour how do you think you've changed how you act both inside and outside of the classroom?

Appendix P: Themes for Students and Exit Slip Question

Relatedness:
- Connecting to Self
- Connecting with others through sharing
- Relating through books
- Helping/Trusting each other
- Sense of community/family

Autonomy:
- Initial response to autonomy
- Choice/interests
- Self-direction
- Maturity and confidence
- Independence beyond school

Learning 4 C's
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Critical thinking

Competency:
- Feedback
- Direct Instruction: craft of writing, research skills and synthesis
- Caring and confident
- Competent in learning and beyond

Engagement/Enjoyment:
- Choice and voice
- Engaging in the learning process
- Motivated/passionate
- Relating to work = attentive
- Effort/enjoyment

Agency
- Open mindedness
- Empathy
- High school
- Advice for teachers/school
- Taking Action
  - Community / career involvement
  - Visiting classrooms/workshops
  - Having a voice- reaching out.

Exit Slip:

1) *Choose your best piece of writing(s) that reflects one of more of the themes.*

2) Many of you expressed **agency** in terms of in the classroom (open-mindedness, empathy) and in the community based on your experiences with the choice and voice approach.
- ***In thinking about your behaviour how do you think you've changed how you act both inside and outside of the classroom?***

3) Researchers have shown that having competency, autonomy and relatedness leads to enhanced personal well-being.
- ***Do you think the choice and voice approach impacted your well-being? If so, describe how.***

Appendix Q: Peer Reviewer's Confidentiality Agreement

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

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Winnipeg, Manitoba
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Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

Principal Investigator
Jennifer Hall
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Phone ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
E-mail: hallj@myumanitoba.ca

Thesis Advisor
Barbara McMillan, Ph. D.
282 Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Voice Mail (204 474 9036
E-mail: barbara.mcmillan@umanitoba.ca

Dear Syd Korsunsky,

Thank you for agreeing to act as my peer reviewer for the research study *Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well*-being that is part of my Master's degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Your role as peer reviewer will be to discuss the process of the study with me and assess whether my interpretations of the data and findings are accurate (not biased). As such, you will have access to the identifiable and non-identifiable data.

I am writing to inform you, as peer reviewer, of your obligations with respect to confidential handling of students' personal data, specifically:

   a) their participation in the research study as one of the ten former students selected for full participation (parental/guardian consent and personal assent to being interviewed, participating in a focus group discussion, permitting my use of samples of their writing and/or art works in the thesis and/or dissemination of the research results);

   b) the verbatim transcriptions of each of the ten student participant's one-on-one interview with me;

   c) the verbatim transcription of the focus group discussion with the ten student participants; and

   d) samples of writing and works of art, from former students who are neither interviewed nor participants in the focus group, that originated in my Grade 7/8 English Language Arts instruction at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School in the ▮▮▮▮▮▮ School Division between September 2013 and June 2018 and for which I have parental/guardian consent and student assent to use in my thesis and/or the dissemination of the research results.

All information and data provided to me as the principle researcher (Jennifer Hall) and shared with you will not be discussed or disclosed to any other individual. Moreover, you are obliged to return any copies made of the data and to continue to protect participants'

confidentiality after the study is completed in July 2019. If you agree to these obligations, please read the Confidentiality Agreement below, add your signature and date and return the signed form to me in the preaddressed envelope provided.

Thank you,

 Jennifer Hall

Confidentiality Agreement

I _____ understand that as a peer reviewer, I will have access to confidential information. In this position, I undertake

a) **to take all possible steps to preserve strict confidentiality regarding any information to which I have access as Jennifer Hall's peer reviewer.**
b) **Never to pass any information obtained as part of Jennifer Hall's research study to anyone.**
c) **To keep all names, contact details and personal information secure.**

Signed _____   Date   _____

Appendix R: Transcriber's Confidentiality Agreement

Faculty of Education
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Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well-being

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Dear Marissa Kellett,

Thank you for agreeing to assist in transcribing interviews for the research study *Choice and Voice in Middle School: Cultivating Agency for Well*-being that is part of my Master's degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Your role as transcriber will be to transcribe interviews. As such, you will have access to the identifiable and non-identifiable data.

I am writing to inform you, as transcriber, of your obligations with respect to confidential handling of students' personal data, specifically:

    e) their participation in the research study as one of the fifteen former students selected for full participation (parental/guardian consent and personal assent to being interviewed, participating in a focus group discussion, permitting my use of samples of their writing and/or art works in the thesis and/or dissemination of the research results);

    f) the verbatim transcriptions of each of the fifteen student participant's one-on-one interview with me; and

    g) the verbatim transcription of the focus group discussion with the fifteen student participants

All interview and focus group data provided to me as the principle researcher (Jennifer Hall) and shared with you will not be discussed or disclosed to any other individual. Moreover, you are obliged to return any copies made of the data and to continue to protect participants' confidentiality after the study is completed in July 2019. If you agree to these obligations, please read the Confidentiality Agreement below, add your signature and date and return the signed form to me in the preaddressed envelope provided.

Thank you,

Jennifer Hall

Confidentiality Agreement

I _____ understand that as a transcriber, I will have access to confidential information. In this position, I undertake

d) **to take all possible steps to preserve strict confidentiality regarding any information to which I have access as Jennifer Hall's transcriber.**
e) **Never to pass any information obtained as part of Jennifer Hall's research study to anyone.**
f) **To keep all names, contact details and personal information secure.**

Signed _____   Date   _____

Appendix S: "**Peace! We Replied**" by Aya

In the morning we took the bus to Taiyba to escape from the war. I went with my sister, my parents, and my grandma; we spent one night on the bus. After that the Syrian army attacked the city with like 50 rocks and bombs. We became frightened, so we made a decision to leave Syria and go to Jordan. We registered our names with the Syrian army on the list of people going there.

The Revolution's Army accompanied us until the border to protect us from the Syrian Army. When we arrived at the border, the Syrian Army was scanning the border with a strong light. We were advised to crawl on the ground until we crossed the border and the Jordan army welcomed us into their country. At that time our Revolution Army left and we finally felt safe.

They took us by bus to the refugee camp called Al Zaatary where we spent 15 days. These were the worst days in my life. The camp was not clean, with no facilities. They gave us only one bedroom for all of my family; the washroom was outside the building, and I was not able to use it at night because of the dark.

At that time most of my family got sick; my grandma has bronchial asthma and her condition deteriorated. I also got sick; I had a fever and became weak and unable to walk. My mother was pregnant at that time and she suffered a lot.

We decided to leave the camp; my father has a friend in Jordan, and he contacted him to arrange for moving. He rented a house for us and at that day we took a taxi and left the camp to our new house in Jordan. The trip was short; it took only two hours and finally we arrived to the house where we would spend the next three years.

The journey was not easy. I was too much excited about the new house and I could not wait to leave the camp. I was happy, but I didn't want to rush so as not to be disappointed. My father called and asked us to pack our bags as he was coming with the taxi. I was sick and sleeping a lot, but somehow I felt stronger and got up from my bed knowing we were leaving. I packed up the bags with my mother and counted the minutes to leave. The taxi finally arrived and we started the trip to the new house in Jordan .

This journey was not very long, and when I first arrived at the new house I liked it from the first look. It was a small older house with 3 bedrooms, one washroom and a kitchen. My mom gave one bedroom for my young sister and me; it was a big room with two beds and a nice window.

The view from my window was amazing! The mountains and the green lands were everywhere. I was so happy that every day I could see the beauty of nature from my window. At that moment I hoped that I would have a calm and nice life with my family.
`
It was a good start in Jordan. I thought life would be better there, but it was still not that good. The Jordanese army prevented all Syrian people from work, from buying cars and a lot of things. When my father would leave home to search for a job, I was afraid that the army would arrest him, send him back to Syria and that he would never return back. The life there was difficult; my

father has no fixed job, and there was little money, At least my sister and I went to school; it was nice and we had a lot of friends.

One day we received a phone call from the government; they asked our parents if we wanted to immigrate to Canada. That was an idea my family liked.

When my parents asked us "Would you like to go to Canada?" we quickly accepted. We arrived last January.

When we accepted to go to Canada, the process started with an interview at the Canadian Embassy. They asked us why we wanted to go to Canada and what we expected.

"Peace!" we replied.

"You will be Canadian citizens with all the rights; you can own a house, buy a car and find a job," they replied. I felt like I was as happy as I'd ever been in my life.

After the interview, we waited for what seemed like a very long time; then we received a phone call that informed us there were tickets for all of us for an airplane going to Canada. We had only four days to pack our bags and be ready.

It was a hard and busy time as we were packing our bags. We had to get rid of the furniture we had, and clean the house before leaving. Then, it was the day of travelling; they asked us to go to a camp where all the Syrian people who wanted to travel were staying. Soon they started to call us to take the bus to the airport, and so began our journey to Canada.

Appendix T: "Always a 'But'" by Alika

"good job Alika, but . . ."

there's always a "but"

every day I try my best
to be the best
and every day there's a "but…"

I feel like I've failed

this word haunts me
like a ghost in my mind
but in this case it is real

and this ghost is not kind

this ghost is the one to make me fall
this ghost is the one to make me fail
this ghost is the one that does this to me

it steals my confidence
like the Grinch on Christmas
and every day

I let it do this to me

It feeds off my fear like a hungry lion
and I give it its every minute meal

I know I have to stop . . .
but how?

how can I defeat my worst enemy
the one who puts me down
for its own pleasure?

and laughs in my face every time

this is a battle I don't think I can win
it's like a lost cause

but to me it's not

if this ghost wants to win
it's gotta do better
because I will do my best

and make every 'BUT' count

because I now know that every time
I'm corrected
it's because where I see a mistake

they see potential

Appendix U: "Depression Inquiry" by Tyler

Excerpt from beginning of story…

I wake up still being me, the kid known as Noah Smith.

I get up, throwing on a t-shirt and a pair of jeans, I quickly down a bowl of cereal, pack my books in my bag, slap on my Under Armour hat and rush through the door for school. Rebecca is waiting at the end of my street.

"Hey!" I say.
"Hey Noah." She says.
"How are you doing?"
"Pretty good! You?"
"Decent, I guess."
"Just decent? Come on cheer up!"
She lightly punches my arm, indicating I should "cheer up."

But that's not what is wrong, it comes in later.

We are walking to school when she says:
"I think you should be careful today…"
"Why?" I ask being concerned.
"Because when you left early yesterday, Brent and Michael were saying you 'deserve a punishment', that's code for beating someone up!"
"I'll be fine Becc, they wouldn't dare doing that, they know that they already have two strikes, next strike they'll be forced to move schools."

She looks at me, knowing I'm not scared. We keep walking until we get to school, Grade 8 sucks. I give her a very light peck on the cheek as I head to class, I'm on the first floor and she's on the second. I drop my stuff into my locker, and as I check my phone, I have a message from Rebecca…

Excerpt from end of story

July 4th, 2018

I've been seeing therapy, and my therapist has helped me see a few things:
- Rebecca does actually care about me and does want me in her life.
- I really should ignore the bully's threats.
- I need to understand her

Rebecca does need me. She needs friends, she needs someone to make her realize her worth, and I guess I've done that for her.

I need **her** approval. For what? She needs my approval of friendship. Maybe more than friendship… does she like me? Maybe, maybe that's why she cares so much about me. Sometimes maybe if they like someone, they'll help them through tough times, just maybe that's it. She cares about me, and I guess I care about her too. I think if the roles were reversed, I'd probably do the same thing and more.

Well, I guess <u>anyone with depression should know I guess **someone** out there cares about them.</u> No pills could treat this, <u>therapy is the best treatment.</u> She encouraged me to go to therapy, and I took her advice, I reached out and I'm going to **free** therapy sessions, free?! This therapist says that help should be free, but it's crazy! Free therapy!?

<u>Someone **always** cares…</u>

Appendix V: "Different Set of Eyes" by Nicole

I am going to tell you 4 stories, about 4 people who have made me see the world through a different set of eyes…

1. When I was in grade seven, I would always go to my friend Kelsey's room at lunch. In her class was a girl named Silver; she was always eating when I came in. I never really became close with her, mainly because I didn't make an effort to. Although...I still remember her. She always had the biggest smile on her face and she had the most beautiful blue eyes.

I remember that she loved cupcakes, and she called them "cup cup." People always impersonated her by saying that. They probably didn't realize what they were doing. I don't know why they found it so funny. They may have not found it funny as much as it was cute, but that was still not a reason to mock her.

Silver left last year to go to another school, and I haven't seen her since. I totally regret not becoming closer with her. She seemed so nice, so happy. She would have made a great friend.

<div align="center">***</div>

Dylan texts me saying; "Look who was on TV?!" There is a video attached. It is a commercial, and it takes me a moment to realize that Silver is an actress in it. She still has those sky blue eyes, and a smile even larger than the last time I had seen her. He texts me again, "I miss her so much :("

"Me too," I reply.. because I really do, I should have made more of a relationship. Dylan was really close with her and had a huge connection with her, I have never seen this side of him. As I said many times before, I regret not being friends with her. I really do, I should have thought of that before.

"You never realize how much you loved someone until they are gone."

2- It was just a normal afternoon at school, and I was probably doing math. Yeah, that sounds about right. Daniel was sitting across from me; he was holding a calculator, probably doing math too. Suddenly he swung his arm back and let go of the calculator.

I saw it slowly coming straight at my face, but just like in the movies, I didn't move. Not one bit. I don't even think I tried to move. Even though I had plenty of time to move my head just a little bit to the side, instead . . . *Crash! Bang! Pow!*

It hit me straight in the eye. "OUCH!" I said, half yelling. Everyone turned to see what happened. All eyes on me!

"Daniel!" My teacher got really mad at him. I knew he didn't mean to hit me. He was probably just getting frustrated and lost control. My eye didn't even hurt that much; it was the shock that hurt more. I had ice on it all day, but I got to sit out of gym . . . which was definitely a win!

Lots of people would avoid him, lots of people told me to avoid him. Of course I was scared he would do it again, and maybe next time it would hurt more. Honestly though, he threw a calculator and it happened to hit me in the eye? I didn't take it personally; I guess that's what's different about me.

3- I was helping out for Phys-Ed Leadership one day, when a whole bunch of kids from other schools came to ours for a basketball workshop. I saw Karl's name on the sheet! I was so happy, I hadn't seen him in forever. Well not since grade 5.

Sorry: you're probably wondering who this mysterious Karl dude is. Well… Ever since kindergarten, Karl had been the class clown. Whenever you needed cheering up, he was the guy to do it. He was one of my best friends; he always came to my birthday parties. When I found out he wasn't coming to the same middle school as me, I was devastated. He had been in my class almost all of elementary. I had known him since kindergarten. Now I had to say goodbye? He was the first boy who really wanted to be my friend.

Back to 2016.

I was looking for him all day, and then there he was. "Karl!" I screamed across the gym. He looked at me, but I don't think he knew who I was. Kelsey and I starting walking closer to him. "Hey Karl, do you remember us?" I say.

'*God, I hope he does!*' I think to myself.

"Of course!" he said with a smile, the same smile I had remembered, "You're Nicole and Kelsey!"

Just that moment I realized, it was flattering how he remembered me after 3 years. Maybe he didn't feel the same connection as me and just forgot. Although he didn't, he remembered me! I was so excited I got to see him. It was like a mini-reunion.

"A strong friendship doesn't need daily conversations, as long as the relationship lives in the heart. True friendship will never part"

4- Iladeya is in grade 6 at my school and she loves dancing. And I mean LOVES it! The first time I really got to know her, and learn about her love for dancing, was at "Bark in the Park". Before that, I had seen her in the halls, but never really talked to her. (bad on my part, she's a hoot!)

It was lunch time and she was dancing. She was doing the famous 'Watch me Whip', and my friends and I all gathered around her. She loved the attention, so she kept dancing. Joelle started

playing the music, Iladeya started singing along. Everyone was laughing, not at her, but with her. We were having such an amazing time together. She is always dancing, and always smiling.

At the last school dance we had, she was dancing like crazy! A whole bunch of the grade 8's gathered around her and created a dance circle. Then a couple of teachers yelled at us all, "Don't give her attention, just ignore her, then she'll stop."

I was shocked that the teachers would say that to her. To me, that was very rude and disrespectful. If she wants to dance, let her dance. It was a school DANCE, wasn't it? And if we wanted to gather around and clap, why not? Were we making fun of her? No, we were having fun as a school, by not leaving grade sixes like her out.

I realize now that I should have said that to the teachers, instead of just thinking it. It could have gotten them thinking. To this day I see her in the halls all the time, and she always gives me a huge hug.

She honestly makes my day just a little bit better.

<div align="center">***</div>

Now that you have read about these 4 people, you're probably wondering: *What do they have in common?*

Well I left something out in the stories . . . they all have different sorts of disabilities. But you would have never known if I didn't tell you. To me that doesn't matter. People are people!

I have had many opportunities in my life to get to know people with different types of disabilities. I am very lucky because now I am more aware when I see someone with a disability. Lots of people are very ignorant towards them because they don't know any better.

They need to.

People need to be educated on this topic.

"The worst thing about a disability is that people see it before they see you!" -Easter Seals

Appendix W: Homelessness Journal Inquiry by Karley

Note: Highlighting indicates where Karley incorporated her research

"Get out of this house! Or else you have one minute before I physically kick you, and throw your stuff out with you, I warned you if you rise again at me when I punish your sister it's the end of the road for you" said my very own father.
"Don't worry, I'm already packed up and ready to go this is the last you will be ever seeing of me!" pulling up the handle on my suitcase I responded with tears running down my face
(My 10-year-old sister cries in the background)
"I told you she was a waste of space before she was even born Elisabeth" my dad says to my mom.
"Please don't do this to her," my mother responded.
"I will come back for you my baby girl!" she added.
Rolling my suitcase down the driveway I turned to look back 1 last time, he smacked her in the face. "Thank goodness that would be the last time I ever I have to see that!" I think to myself.

***

When I was 10 years old, my 17 year old brother was murdered because he hung out with the wrong people and started dealing. My mom got really depressed, but she got back on her feet once she started taking the meds I gave her. Then she became happy again. But she wasn't "normal" you know? She was that like over happy kind of a person. Like even when my dad came home high as a kite & drunk, and even when he would hit her. Then "cry" about it later she would always forgive him. She should of left him a long time ago.

I was only 13 years old when my parents disowned me. Their own daughter, their own blood. Now look at me? 15 years old, homeless, broke and alone. Sure I sometimes had a roof over my head staying at the kids houses who got me kicked out of my own house, but to eat… well that's how I learned how to steal.

I had been saving up for a while, I knew I would get kicked out eventually, so that money would be for food and water. My friends had never made me pay rent, as long as I wasn't staying that long. I could take showers at their houses, and I usually just ended up stealing some of their own.

Today I was walking from a friends house, to another's because I apparently "I don't clean up my mess" like I don't even have a mess to clean. So I was just on my way and saw a news article on the ground. I read *"42 year old arrested for breaking and entering drug dealer's home, sentenced 1 year"* I continue *"John Smith has been a known drug dealer in the past but we had lost track of him the past years after his own son (Jonathan Smith) was murdered, until now. We have never heard of him or had any cases involving him doing drugs, only selling. Now we can atleast take him in for this" -says officer that has been investigating him for years. My Father had been arrested. Finally something he deserved.*

I kept walking, but then I had thought of something new… my mom is now probably off her meds, so instead of walking toward my friends, I turn to go home but not for my mom, she always said she cared, but never came back for me. I was going back for my sister.

This is why when I see my mother again, I will not call her mom. She is Elizabeth now.

I am now walking on the same street I grew up on, standing in front of the house that raised me. I haven't been back here in 2 years. I didn't get to see my sister grow into her 12 year old self she is today. I wasn't there to protect her from our father. Or to protect her from ~~mom~~ Elizabeth crying her tears as she grabbed dad new beers every few minutes.

I hear a scream. All my feelings that I've had been trying to lose in the past two years, hit me & hard.

I run into the house like there's no tomorrow. My mom had a gun to her head. My sister was balling.
"Em you're home!" my sister noticed me….
"Emily Marie Smith…. Is that you?" my mom was confused too see me because I guess you could say I made a few changes before she last saw me.
"Yeah Eliz----- mom. It's me." I said staring at the woman who ~~raised me,~~ tried to raise me. I had planned to call her by her first name, but I just couldn't do it.
"You're home!" my mom said confused, I look toward my sister.
"She's been off her meds…" my sister said shivering in fear
"I tried to help her, but then I walked home from school to this…" she added
"Mom… put down the gun. I'm home. And dad will be back soon." I knew she had to hear this
"You're home…." she started to lower the gun
"Yes mom, I'm back" I said staring her in the eyes
"And dad's coming home soon?" she asked
"Yes mom, he will be home in a bit" I looked at my sister to go along with it
"Mom we will all be a family again, just put it down." my sister pleaded

She put down the gun, I made dinner, stuck her meds down her throat, signed her up for a nurse to take her to the nutmeg house in the morning. Then I tucked her into bed, told my mom I loved her, packed my sisters bags and we got out of that house before sunrise.

But now that there was two of us, we had no connections. No place to stay, no money. We were broke, homeless and would soon become hungry, but atleast we were together.

So for the night we find a spot under the Salter bridge, cover up with everything we have left. Then we cuddle together for warmth, we can worry about this another day.

3 days later I wake up and look around me, it snowed last night and the sun is just starting to set, it's freezing outside, and I'm alone….my sister is gone.

Tears run down my face, it's hard to breathe. She was all I had left. I pack up my things and start walking, I run now. I'm trying to hold on for dear life. I stop running, fall to the ground curl up in a ball because I realize….I'm all alone.

I decide that my time is over, and that I give up and I pass out tiredly. Then I feel a tap on my shoulder. It was her, my sister.

"Em what are you doing here I've been looking all over the place for you!" she said

I look at her up and down making sure it was her, because she looked different, skinnier. It had been only 3 days and she looked skinnier; maybe 4, I think a whole day had gone by, by now.

"I woke up and you were gone, I want looking for you but I got so tired and upset I had just fallen asleep." I say standing up. She hugs me.

"We ran out of food." she added

"I know," I agreed

"I went to go get some more, with the money we had left. And I researched a place for us to stay, I made some calls and got us a bed for a few days." she told me.

"I'm supposed to be the one taking care of you, not the other way around." I blurted out

"You have been taking care of yourself and me for a while now, it's my turn. She said

"Fine." I responded

"Now we better start walking, it's getting late." then we started walking.

We arrive at the Macdonald Youth centre, we have 3 days to stay here.

As we wake up the next morning we got to meet Janet, our new social worker who was finding us a "home" for a while.

Today was day 3, and we were lucky and had found a "home" to stay in for a while. They fed us, we could stay clean, and I when we were ready get back into school.

A few days when we at the new house I had found a note. It was a suicide note, from my sister. Then as I walked into the garage looking for her, I found her. Head separated from her spine, blue as the ocean, hung from the ceiling, dead. I fell to the ground because it was all over.

Our foster parents walked on me on the ground, screaming. Holding onto her leg, telling her to come back even though I knew she couldn't.

"I had no idea it was this bad, I thought she was doing okay. Is this my fault? Was I responsible for this? Why her? Why would she do this to me? To herself?" I kept screaming these things to myself. The mother tried to pull me away saying "it will be okay" and everything, but she doesn't know me, she didn't know my sister either. Therefore, she does not get to comment. The father was calling the police, my social worker, his parents. Neither of them knew what to do, how to feel. But neither did I; I don't understand.

The police were taking statements from our foster parents, while Janet was trying too talk to me, asking me questions in ways I did not know how to respond.

Next I was placed back into the Macdonald youth centre for the next 3 days. I didn't do much the first day other than sleep eat, talk, then sleep some more. But as it was late at night a girl that was in the house named Julia, knocked on my door. She said thought I just needed someone to talk to and be there for me, which was pretty true.

I had found out that she has no family, that they had all died in a car accident last year. And Because of that she had huge depression and had wanted to kill herself until one day someone had told her that she has it bad, but no matter what happens someone in the world had it worse.

That and this kind of is a wake up call because now I know that my sister wouldn't want me to be sitting here feeling sorry for myself, that I need to build a future for myself and thats what I am going to do.

The next day I had met with janet and told her that I don't want my life to lay out my path anymore, that I want to make my life and live it the way I want and the way my sister would've wanted me too. She has showed me all my options of what my next step was.

Over the next few days I had moved into an all girls group home called "Matheson Group Home" because we decided that was better fitted for me.

In a few weeks I had started going to school again, at MaryMound school.

I had slowly started getting back onto my feet.

A year later- Today Janet has explained to me my next step. She wants me to start in a program called "Independent Living With Supports," for ages 16-21. It is suppose to help me transfer into "Independent Living," it is suppose to help me learn how to live on my own. By staying in my own apartment I'm supposed to learn how to stay healthy, maintain a job, so I can gain my independence also so I can learn how to develop my basic life skills.

A few years later- A week ago I had finally turned 18, and today is my first day of joining a new programs. It is called "The Life Train program," where I have 1 on 1 support, on for what my next step is on how to completely have my independent living, they also are helping me get a better job and go back into school.

I am finally happy that I get to have a life for myself, for me and my sister. Without any of the help I had I would not be where I am today. I'm just going to live the life my sister wanted me to and make her proud.

Sources
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https://www.mys.ca/services
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https://www.mys.ca/services/transition-resources

Appendix X: "Keepin' it Positive" by Riley

"I'm off to the gym" I hear my step-dad say to my mom as I sit in my room in front of the TV. With my controller in hands, I try to focus on the game I'm playing just . . . but for some reason I find it hard. After about 2 hours of constant gaming, losing every single match, I take a break and go use the bathroom. "9:00 pm," I say to myself as I notice the clock. I go back into my room, change into my pajamas and continue to play games.

During the school year, I've noticed that some kids always find someone to pick on, no matter what. You could be the nicest, coolest person ever, but still they'd find a way to make fun of you,

I learned that by being called fat. It didn't bother me at the time, but eventually you get the cancer known as "self consciousness". That's what was going through my head that night. I could only think about the way I look. I realized it got to me, and it doesn't feel good when it happens.

'*What did I do to deserve this? What did I do?*'

The next day I walked up to my step-dad and asked, "Could I start going to the gym?"

I quit playing football and hockey almost as soon as I started. Soccer and baseball never interested me; the only time I got physical activity was when I went out somewhere like to a beach or park or camping. But I've always liked video games. I played them everyday. And I've always like food. When I eat a lot and just sit down for hours upon hours in front of a screen, I noticed that I didn't gain even a little bit of self-esteem. I tried not to make it into a negative situation, because I HATE being gloomy. Instead I think there is always a way to make things humourous and or positive.

I kept on seeing my dad, step-dad and brother working out at the gym. I could see that they did it to make themselves feel better, and change the way they looked. They are my inspirations, and that night I realized that if I don't like the way I felt, I had to do something about it.

These days I'm pretty much the same, except for the way I look at people. I've noticed I have very low patience for some things and I'm trying to change that (Okay - I'm really not). But since I've lost around 10 pounds I have learned to just not give a damn about meaningless words.

I still eat like I have not seen food in two years, and video games are still my life. But by feeling better about myself I've learned "to keep everything positive."

And I have developed my own fair insult system.

Appendix Y: "What If?" by Brady

Note: To view feedback on right hand margin click on "View" then "Markup"

WHAT IF?

The date is June 28th, 2013. My last day in Grade Six. The sun is shining a bright yellow hue on the cloud-littered sky. I'm inside Room 105. I look at the boxes we've made - our teacher had us make them earlier in the year for people to calm down, if we were feeling stressed. Each box has things that are precious to us. In my box, I put a little shark's tooth that I got in Grade 3, along with a lot of other important objects to me. But I also put my iPod there today, so it wouldn't get lost or stolen.

A sudden but familiar *BLEEEEEEEEEEEEP* plays out of square-like speakers on the roof. School is over!!

I walk out of the room, and outside. Excitement flows through my veins. Screeching seagulls circle the school. Loud, excited, screaming. The growling of buses, the laughter of children, and the whirring of bike and skateboard wheels fill the air. Students asking and answering the inevitable: "Whose class are you in?" I wonder myself whose class I'm in.

I open the envelope containing my report card and take out a white paper. First up: the behavior grades - mostly "C" for consistent. I'm a quiet kid most of the time. Then I see the main subjects: Math, Science, L.A., Social Studies, French - all relatively good grades. I'm proud, but only a little surprised. I worked real hard this year.

Now I look for my next year's teacher's name. I set my eyes on the letters typed in an old-computer-like font:

J.HALL

Okay, I think. *I haven't heard of her. (Or him?)* I don't know a lot of teachers in this school, but I remember seeing that name on room 102. *Wow, just three classes away, and I haven't even heard of them?! This class will be a whole new world. No, a whole new universe! I guess that's how it is every year.*

Heh. Just a bunch of universes that we enter in every year, huh? It's strange how different they can be.

Then, I realize that those thoughts about universes . . . I wonder if they might be a powerful metaphor . . .

I wonder a lot about the universe. Like is there just one? Or a hundred? Ten trillion? Maybe there aren't any at all; maybe we're just in one enormous "classroom." Maybe there's just one version of reality. Maybe there's just one chosen possibility. Maybe there's just one timeline, and if you screw up, you screw up for good.

Commented [1]: What might get you thinking like this? Is there a story here? Where might you have been when all these questions started to come to you? Usually something has to HAPPEN to get the brain thinking like this. A book we read, a movie we watch, something happens to someone , , , that's what I mean by a "story"

Commented [2]: thanks. while i was typing this piece, i had a feeling that something was still missing. but now, i think i have a pretty good idea of what i might do.

Commented [3]: i've bridged the thoughts of schools and universes, (actually quite a while ago) but i'd like to know if i need to bridge the ideas later in the story, like when my friends ask me if i want to walk with them?? if not, what would be my next step?

Commented [4]: I love the writing in the beginning. You are so talented, and you really show the event you have chosen to begin with. I'm just not sure about your "bridge" - it didn't really ring true as to how you got to your alternative universe.

I love your questions, but I just wonder if they could somehow "fit" together a bit better. Sort of have one idea FLOW into the next one. They seemed kind of random to me (or maybe I missed something).

I LOVE the idea that your missing box could be in an alternate universe. Here's the challenge - can you somehow take your story, and all your questions, and then connect it to the missing item. Can you think of an eerie "clue" that would make the reader think that it's somehow been "transported" out of our universe? I'm not sure how to do that, but I have a lot of confidence in you.

If you aren't sure what I mean, let's talk in class tomorrow.

This could be a CLASSIC.

Commented [5]: thank you!! i've made a new "bridge" between my ideas. I'm still working on trying to make my questions flow. I actually got my box back- but the idea that it was transported to another universe is pretty cool, and I decided to use it anyways. I've tried to link all of my ideas to this part in my story, (highlighted in red) The rest of the… [1]

Commented [6]: I challenged you - and YOU DID IT! The connections are awesome - and I bet not that different than the way you REALLY think. This is a classic!

Commented [7]: thank you so much for the help and feedback!! i've done the minilesson today, in pink, after the end of the story.

Commented [8]: WOW! I love what you did with that mini-lesson today Brady. You certainly made that "steal" your own- quite the tension you create!

Commented [9]: Okay, time to put all the puzzle pieces together so I can do the final edit. Remind me - where did that moment of tension come from (the one at the very end in pink)? Are you going to use it somehow?

Commented [10]: don't really know if I'm gonna use it. I think i'll transfer it to another document...

Maybe this is all there is.

Maybe not.

Could we make a "window" through our universe and see the other ones?
Will I be alive the day we could do something like that?

My train of thought comes to a sudden stop. "Do you want to walk home with us?" my friends
ask. I nod, and we start to stroll down the sidewalk. My mind resumes its journey.

What happens when I "leave" the "classroom"?

Is that what death is? What happens then, after death? *Is heaven a city? A kingdom? A
sanctuary?* Maybe you watch over the Earth from this big globe in the afterlife. But what if,
instead of an afterlife, we restart? Like, in a video game, where you have extra life. Say, is there
such thing as a second life? Are second lives the reason for Deja Vu? Has it happened in your
previous life? Are second lives my "return" to the "classroom"?

I decide to stop daydreaming, and come back to reality.The sun still shines a bright yellow hue
on the cloud-littered sky. My friends and I are pretty close to the neighborhood where we live.

I check my bag for the special box I made earlier in the year. After all, that box contains lots of
things that are precious to me. Also, my iPod's in there - my parents would murder me if I left
my iPod at school for the summer break.

It's not in my bag.

I check through every corner and crevice in there. Every pocket, every zipper scoured through.

Double checked.

Triple checked.

Quadruple checked.

I see nothing but empty, dark, space . . . empty, dark, space.

Was it taken to another classroom?

Did I drop it outside?

Did someone see it through the window and take it?

I try to ignore the fact for now. It's the last day of school. I shouldn't be that stressed. But as my
friends and I talk and laugh, little do they know how worried I am. My stress swells and swells

like a balloon that's about to pop. But through that, I still somehow manage to prevent myself from bursting.

After I get home, I confess to my parents that I forgot my box at school. My precious box. I don't mention my I Pod.

We drive back to school. The sun starts to lower across the cloud littered sky. And on the car ride back to school, I begin to wonder what would happen if I never forgot that special little box in an alternate universe. That would be a happier universe for me right now.

Later, as I lay in my bed, my mind starts to make final thoughts, reflecting on what has happened to me. *Today has been a nightmare.*

That's it!

Maybe life is just one big dream. Maybe we're all standing here, living in our dream, never knowing when we'll wake up. Some of our dreams are pleasant. Some are nightmares. But the strong **–** they persist through the unpleasant. They say to themselves, *No! I won't wake up yet!* They do their best to make their dream better.

Sometimes, like today, our dreams may end in a nightmare. But when we wake up, we are relieved.

Maybe that's what life is. I bury myself in my blanket, hoping that in a few hours I will finally awaken from this nasty dream.

And prepare for the next one.

Commented [11]: I hope you don't mind the minor changes I made during editing. You will see many times where I shortened paragraphs down to make them more dramatic. And I also expanded on some of your ideas. Anything you don't like, feel free to let me know and change it back. It's so much easier to edit a few things than it is to create such a great piece. Remember when I had the idea for something similar? I doubt I could have written it this well.

Appendix Z: "Involved in a Different Way" by Jon

I stand around the computers with all of my friends, socializing on how our summers will be. Lots of people are going to the lake, and lots of them are just hanging around home, me being one of them. I'm not really paying attention to my friends. I feel kind of bad because it seems like they can tell. I was paying more attention to my high pitched teacher's voice, squeaking out the names of classmates while handing out our report cards.

"Jon!" my teacher yells. Little needles start to pierce my stomach, and butterflies start to sway inside of me. "Come get your report card!" I drag my limp legs toward her. The excitement/nervousness overwhelms me. I'm dreading the fact that grade seven just ended.

'Of course my report card is going to be good, I get involved a lot, and hand in my work on time. I've always had good marks too. School's so boring and so easy, as long as I hand in my work on time and get good grades, I'm set. I have nothing to worry about. School's so easy!'

I caress the sealed white envelope in my shaky hands, trying carefully not to drop it. My hand lightly touches the flap of the envelope, un-sure if I want to open it. As I look around the class, I think about the new wonders of next year, and the new home I'll be moving into.

The "slit" sound of the paper startles me. It seems to me that my hand is its own creature now. It's like it became an animal over a few seconds. As the small piece of pink paper slides out of its envelope, my breathing stops, my mind slows down. *'What if I don't get the teacher I want? What if I fail grade 8? What if I don't know anyone in my new class? What if my new teacher doesn't like me? What if, what if!?'* All these thoughts race through my head. It feels like my brain is going on overdrive.

'Wait, all I need is good grades, and I'm good to go! Piece of cake.'
I open my report card…

Out comes my cell phone, flying out of my pocket. I frantically text my mom to try to get me switched out of the class, while trying not to drop my phone. **HURRY MOM YOU NEED TO GET ME OUT OF THIS CLASS! A.S.A.P!** '*What if I'm stuck in this class? What if we can't get switched? PLEASE don't let this happen.'*

We had this planned out before; if I opened my report card, and if the teacher showed up, the one that was on my report card, I was to immediately text my mom to try to get me switched out of the class.

Unfortunately, that process took a while to happen.

<div align="center">***</div>

Half way through the summer, I get a call from Mrs. Jane Romio. My mom walks slowly down the stairs and into the basement.

'I know that walk, something is wrong.'

"Jon, I have some bad news. The teacher you requested, his class is all filled up. There's not even a slim chance that you can get in. I'm so sorry."

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

A couple of weeks later I get a call from my principal once again. She tells me that I have only two choices to go into. I tell my Mom to pick for me. As she tells me who she picked, I can't hide my disappointment.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

I walk into the dimly lit, wide building, now known as my home for the upcoming year. As I stroll down the long hallway, my stomach turns upside down. I am terrified of the upcoming year. The class I am going into has already been together for two years. Some of them even three!

I take my first steps into that new class, the first few seconds are nerve wracking and embarrassing.
'I have the grade 8 jitters.'

I think back to the previous summer, wondering about the new school year.

"I know I want my new teacher to like me, but I also want to feel accepted by the kids in the class. I know most of them, but coming in as a new student… I just don't know if they'll accept me," I say to an empty room.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

It is a chilly day; I nervously stroll into the school once again for first term parent teacher conferences. My parents were jumpy with excitement to get right into the conference. I didn't know why, but it seems like they were excited about a certain something.

I cautiously knock on my classroom's door, trying carefully not to disturb the other student's conferences. "Come on in!" says Ms. Hall cheerfully.

The conference was going on as normal; I was showing my parents around the class, and sharing my learning to them.

"So how's it going?" asks Ms. Hall with a grin on her face.

"Amazing," my parents say in unison.

"I'm very happy with the work Jon has put in this term. Being one of the new students in the class, I thought it might be hard for him to fit into the groove of things, but, as you can see from his work, that definitely isn't the case!" Ms. Hall was grinning ear to ear as she talked. A feeling of pride spread through me, and my whole body turns as red as a baboon's butt.

"As are we," says my Mom. "We've never seen him so excited about school before. We used to ask him; what did you do in school? All he'd say was nothing. He now explains everything to his fullest ability."

"That's so true," explains my Dad. "He used to hate school, now he's super excited to go! He puts his fullest effort into his projects, and has fun doing it at the same time. I'm not sure what you did to him Ms. Hall; brainwash? Whatever it is, keep it up!"

That's when it hits me!

I've never thought about school like this before my parents said it. I mean, I was doing it the whole time, but I didn't realize it! *'I have been trying my best, and not for the marks, I'm now enjoying school, while trying my very best. I'm still getting involved like last year…*

But I'm getting involved in a different way.'

 The person that lives inside my head is smiling and dancing his head off. I am super proud of myself.

<div align="center">***</div>

From that moment on, I was inspired to try my hardest to succeed. I didn't care about the marks anymore. I just wanted to do my very best.

-Jon