

Seeking New Perspectives on Self-selected and Teacher-assigned Texts:

Exploring Adolescent Readers' Experiences

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the differences between students' perceptions of teacher-assigned and self-selected literature. Five students from the same grade 8 classroom participated in the study, which consisted of reading either an assigned or self-selected text and participating in semi-structured interviews. The interview transcripts were analyzed and coded according to categories designated by the researcher. Findings indicate that these students were more motivated to read when permitted to select their own texts. Students also seemed to gain a greater understanding of content when reading self-selected material. However, the study participants also spoke positively about certain teacher-assigned books, indicating that quality reading materials with high-interest content may take priority over choice. Recommendations for educators include sharing with students their motivations behind reading assignments, and ensuring that classroom libraries are well stocked with a wide selection of texts.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
Dedication.....	ix
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Background to the Problem.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
The Researcher.....	7
Education in Manitoba.....	9
Purpose.....	11
Research Questions.....	12
Overview of the Other Chapters.....	12
Chapter 2. Review of the Literature.....	13
Reading Motivation.....	13
Situated Literacies.....	17
Independent Reading.....	19
Self-selected Reading.....	21
Summary of this Literature Review.....	28
Chapter 3. Method.....	29

The Study Setting.....	29
The School .....	29
The Teacher .....	30
The Classroom .....	31
Participants.....	32
Participant Selection .....	33
Number of Participants .....	34
Participant Descriptions .....	34
Procedure .....	35
Data Collection .....	37
Semi-structured Interviews .....	38
Data Analysis .....	39
Summary of this Method Chapter.....	42
Chapter 4. Results.....	44
What the Students Said About Teacher-assigned Reading.....	45
Teacher Motivations and Perceived Benefits .....	45
Positive Comments About Teacher-assigned Text .....	46
Negative Comments About Teacher-assigned Text .....	48
Content and Connections.....	49
What the Students Said About Self-selected Reading .....	50
Teacher Motivations and Perceived Benefits .....	50
Positive Comments About Self-selected Text .....	51
Negative Comments About Self-selected Text.....	53

Content and Connections .....	53
Sources of Students' Preferred Texts.....	54
Students' Preferred Ways of Responding to Reading.....	56
Summary of this Results Chapter in Relation to the Research Questions .....	58
Chapter 5. Discussion .....	60
Significance of the Study Findings in Relation to Pedagogical Practice.....	60
Theoretical and Research Implications.....	67
Importance of Text Selection.....	68
Student Reactions to Teacher-assigned Text.....	69
Reading Comprehension.....	70
Reading Motivation .....	71
Sources of Students' Texts.....	72
Reading Response.....	73
Suggestions for Future Research .....	74
Limitations of the Study.....	75
Concluding Remarks.....	77
References.....	78
Adolescent Literature Cited .....	90
Appendices.....	91
Appendix A. Ethics Approval.....	92
Appendix B. Researcher Introduction and Recruitment Script .....	93
Appendix C. Letter to Parents.....	94
Appendix D. Consent Form .....	96

Appendix E. Student Assent .....	97
Appendix F. Letter to School Principal and School Superintendent .....	98
Appendix G. Student Interview .....	100
Appendix H. Table 1 .....	101
Appendix I. Table 2 .....	114

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Categories Used to Code the Transcripts of the Recorded Semi-structured Interviews.....	101
2. Explanation of the Examples Used for the Different Coding Categories.....	114
3. Students' Opinions about Teacher-assigned and Self-selected Text .....	44
4. Origins of Students' Preferred Texts .....	55
5. Students' Preferred Ways of Responding to Reading.....	57

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late grandfather, Ralph Johnson, someone who always expressed a love for English literature, but never had the chance to pursue it academically. Thank you for showing me just how beautiful reading can be.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Reading is my escape. When I am reading a good book, I forget my worries and develop deep relationships with the characters. This is what I would like to share with my students. I want them to experience the sensation of diving so deeply into a story that they forget to come up for air. I do my best to create a book-rich environment in my classroom, by choosing texts that I hope my students will want to read. I believe that I have a responsibility to share books with students that they might otherwise never encounter; however, I also recognize that falling in love with a book is a deeply personal event. In my experience, if teachers do not leave room for choice, there is no way to guarantee that students will read, let alone love, the books to which they are exposed in the classroom.

In this study, I asked students in face-to-face interviews to describe their experiences with, and reactions to, both a teacher-assigned and a student-selected text. In addition to the semi-structured interviews with the students, I also collected descriptive data in conversation with the students' teacher and through personal observation of the classroom in which the data was collected. The goal of the research was to explore further the phenomenon of text selection as it pertains to reading motivation in a classroom environment. Additionally, this study aimed to investigate the things that adolescent students said regarding this phenomenon.

I am aware that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, students are reading all sorts of materials beyond the confines of traditional novels. The New Literacy Studies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2000) recognize the variety of text forms with which children can engage. However, from my previous experiences, I have found that students make more in-depth written responses and

have more engaged discussions when they are responding to books, as opposed to things such as magazines or comics. I recognize that my students might also read digital texts from the Internet; however, due to limited access to computers, this is not always possible during class time. In my own classroom, for instance, I want students to be reading during school time but as there is only one computer in the classroom, school-time access to digital texts is limited.

### *Background to the Problem*

Prior to World War I, a common belief among literature teachers and literary theorists was that the author transmitted his/her message directly through the text (Straw, 1990); there was little room for personal interpretation. In English classrooms, teachers assigned students the supposedly “great works” of literature. Students listened to lectures not only on a book’s meaning, but also on the author’s background in order to “understand” what the book meant. For many years, the *transmissive* approach was the acceptable way to teach literature. After World War I, a *translational* model became the predominant teaching method. The emphasis moved to teaching students comprehension skills in order for them to understand texts. This movement, also known as *New Criticism* (Eliot, 1932; Richards, 1926), discouraged individual response, as it was believed that all meaning could be found in the text (Straw), and teachers required that students perform “close readings” to uncover meaning. While the transmissive approach focused on the author, the translational model focused on the text.

In contrast to previous literary theories, reader-response criticism (Fish, 1967; Holland, 1975; Lewis, 1961) and transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1994) recognize the individual response of each reader. Rosenblatt identifies the important role that the reader

plays. Each reader approaches the text with different understandings and past experiences. Furthermore, the same reader may have a different response to a text at a different point in time. This individualized experience with text is defined by Rosenblatt as *the poem*. The reader *creates* meaning through an interaction, or transaction, with the text, instead of searching for it. The reader's stance is essentially as important as the text, if not more so.

Rosenblatt (1994) describes two types of reader stance when approaching a text: efferent and aesthetic. In efferent reading, the reader “disengages” herself/himself from a personal connection with the text. S/he concentrates on the information found within the words and on what knowledge will remain when the reading experience is finished. In aesthetic reading, the reader's purpose is the reading event itself, as the reader concentrates on the actual experience and interaction with the text. This is what allows for a personal response. However, Rosenblatt warns that the aesthetic stance “should not be confused with a simple reverie or train of free associations. Perusal of a text merely leading to free fantasy would not be a reading at all in the transactional sense” (p. 29). In an aesthetic reading, the reader has a heightened awareness of each word on the page, much more so than in an efferent reading, where one is scanning for information.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Teachers often see it as their responsibility to provide access and exposure to quality literature (Carlsen, 1980), including genres and authors that students might otherwise not read. This includes choosing literature from the canon—“the body of major works that a culture considers important at a given time” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 26). Students who wish to pursue English studies in university may need some familiarity with the canon

(Nicol, 2008), but then a danger is that reading can become “aimed squarely at college admissions” (Auciello, 2003, p. 7). Some texts have become almost a rite of passage and it seems that we might occasionally force students to struggle through certain texts because, as students, we had to, as did our parents and grandparents before us. On more than one occasion, my 90-year-old grandfather, glass of sherry in hand, quoted me entire passages from *King Henry V* (Shakespeare, 1993/1599), which he memorized under the forceful hand of his teachers at a British boarding school. The way in which we teach the canon has changed, but many of the works have not.

Many students do not engage in reading the books assigned to them by their teachers. Reasons for less than ideal teacher text selection vary. Sometimes teachers claim that the curriculum mandates which book is used. For others, the choice of texts may come down to budget constraints and the number of copies readily available. Some teachers may select books that they themselves read in school (Nicol, 2008). According to Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995), teachers who are new to the profession will often adopt teaching styles similar to those of their own past teachers. Furthermore, it seems as though many of us associate a particular text with a certain level of school, such as *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1996) with grade 5 or *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 2005/1967) with grade 8. Johannessen (1994) describes the complaints of his colleagues regarding the use of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1981/1884) in a grade 11 American literature course. His colleagues claimed that the pupils did not enjoy the book, and that most of them could not understand it. When Johannessen finally suggested replacing the book with something that students could relate to, he claims it was as if he had suggested the department “invite Charles Manson or Saddam Hussein to teach English” at the school (p. 67)! Even though these teachers

recognized that their students could not engage with the book, they resisted changing their English programs.

While assigned reading may provide teachers with the opportunity to expose their students to literature that pushes them to think critically, we must choose literature that is appropriate for our students. Teachers are faced with the challenge of choosing quality literature for which students are developmentally prepared. We sell our students short by limiting their exposure to texts that we might see as more “useful” to their future professional lives:

Having a very limited secular, utilitarian view of literacy—as a means to employment, for instance—we have invented a kind of teaching that cuts literacy off at the roots, diminishing both its appeal and its capacity to empower. By focusing on literacy as a practical, technical matter, we have reduced it. (Brown, 1991, p. 90)

It is important to remember that the text alone does not determine the purpose for reading (Karolides, 2000). It is counterintuitive to attempt to foster a love for literature, while at the same time distracting students from creating an aesthetic experience by asking them to complete basic comprehension questions that require no critical thinking or personal response. Students adopt a “skim and scan” approach that enables them to extract the necessary information to complete an assignment (Rosenblatt, 1983).

When we turn reading into a chore, into something that students *have* to do, it becomes difficult for them to understand why anyone would *want* to (Atwell, 2007). Atwell (1998) describes her reading class before she saw the importance of giving students choice: she picked the book; she assigned a chapter for homework; and then she tested the students to see if they had actually read. Atwell soon discovered that her idea of important reading

(selections from the literature anthology) was different from that of her students. Atwell states, “I’ll never forget what it was like to stand by myself at the front of the classroom, rephrasing a question about the selection from the literary anthology again and again for a group of bored, polite kids” (p. 50). At least Atwell’s students were polite. Many teachers, including myself, have been on the receiving end of some not so polite behaviour from students who were either unwilling or unable to read the material that was assigned to them.

Although teachers may claim their goal is to cultivate a love of literature in students, in my experience, it seems as though many of us have given up. I know what it is like to be beaten down by the groaning of students when they are asked to get their books out, by their complaints that the material is boring, and by the frustration of having to constantly verify that students are, indeed, completing the assigned reading. According to Auciello (2003), by forcing students to read books that they find neither interesting nor relevant, the only skill we are teaching them is how to get through English classes without reading. Students learn how to “play the game;” they find *Cliffs Notes* (published by Wiley), and get the “answers” from friends or the teacher’s lectures.

In summary, hoping to broaden their students’ reading experiences, teachers assign texts. Due to a lack of interest in the teachers’ selections, these assigned texts often remain unread inside students’ backpacks. This situation is the foundation of my purpose for conducting the proposed study.

### *The Researcher*

During the course of this study, I engaged in conversations with adolescents about their views on classroom text selection. The researcher's background is important in qualitative research such as this because it may affect the selection of participants and the interpretation of data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Since the descriptive and interpretive nature of this study is important, it is likewise important for the reader to know more about me.

I am a 29 year-old, Caucasian female who has been teaching English language arts (ELA) for the past six years at the grade 8 level. I have a strong literate identity, and read everything from digital texts to fiction and magazines in my spare time. I grew up in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia. I was raised in a middle class, literature-rich environment. My mother is a teacher, and reading was always encouraged in my childhood home. She often read aloud to my brother and me at night, until we were able to read independently. I regularly observed both of my parents reading, and frequently received books as gifts.

During my post-secondary studies in English Literature, I quickly learned that, in order to succeed, it was in my best interests to accept the professor's words as gospel. S/he told students what a text meant during lectures, and we re-wrote these opinions in the papers we submitted. I did not have to respond individually, personally or, in my opinion, meaningfully to texts. When I began teaching at my current school, I told myself that I would not inflict the same experience on my students.

Furthermore, I did not want to assign my students the same types of boring comprehension questions I was assigned as a junior high student. I asked my students to

write in reader response journals instead; however, while I was expecting insightful writing, I soon realized that many students saw journal writing as I once saw comprehension questions. Many of them would tell me that they had nothing to write about, or would complete basic plot summaries instead of the meaningful writing for which I was hoping. My students would ask me why they could not just read for fun—why did there always have to be an assignment involved? Although research has shown that students are more motivated when reading for reading's sake (Fisher, 2004; Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Worthy, Broaddus, & Ivey, 2001; Worthy, Turner, & Moorman, 1998), I wanted my students to learn to respond to literature in written form. Written responses are important because writing is one of the six main areas (reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing) of the Manitoba ELA curriculum, and because responding to literature is a required task on the Winnipeg 1 divisional ELA exam. I soon realized, however, that students are more willing to attempt written reader response when they read books that are personally interesting to them.

Once I began my graduate studies, I gained exposure to authors such as Atwell (1998) and Rief (1992), who both believe strongly in the value of written reader response and self-selected literature. Although I began modeling my classroom after the reading and writing workshops described by both authors, I remained wary of allowing students free reign over their literature choices. I felt that I would otherwise have no way to monitor its quality. I wanted my students to experience the bittersweet feeling that most of us have when we come to the end of a really great book; we're sad to say good-bye to the characters, but at the same time, can't wait to find the next one that will keep us hooked. I don't think it is possible to feel that way about every text. I have completed numerous whole class novel studies with students, and on the other end of the spectrum, have allowed students, at times, to read any

self-selected reading material during silent reading time, including magazines and comic books. As such, I found myself in the position of embracing the approaches advocated by educators such as Atwell and Rief, yet struggling to accept the notion of permitting my students to make their own in-class text choices. I became curious as to how students perceived the differences between the texts I assign and the texts they might otherwise choose for themselves. What impact might an alternate approach have on students' motivation? What might students identify as benefits of self-selection? Could they see benefits in having their teacher select the material they were to read?

This information about me will help the reader to position me in relation to the data collected and interpreted over the course of this study. Another researcher might have collected different data or might have even interpreted the same data in a different way. The reader should bear this information in mind as s/he reads the study.

### *Education in Manitoba*

As this study took place in a public school in Winnipeg, Manitoba, it is necessary to provide the reader with an understanding of the context of schooling in the province. The province of Manitoba is located in the centre of Canada, and is known for its extreme climate. There are over a million people living in Manitoba. More than half of the province's inhabitants can be found in Winnipeg, the capital city. Manitoba is a multi-cultural province, with significant Francophone and aboriginal communities.

With the exception of the Manitoba Band Operated Schools, all public schools in Manitoba are governed by school divisions or district boards, and operate directly under the Minister of Education. The financial support for these schools comes from both provincial

funding and taxation. There are also funded and non-funded independent schools in Manitoba; however, it is not necessary for non-funded schools to meet provincial requirements. School is compulsory for every child until the age of 16. Parents or guardians of school-aged children are responsible for ensuring that they attend school regularly. School is in session from September through June, with a two-week break at the end of December and a weeklong break at the end of March. The number of school days in a year varies slightly within the range of 194 to 196 days. Every year, ten non-instructional days may be used toward teacher professional development or parent-teacher/student-led conferences

There are four main school programs available in Manitoba: the English Program, the French Immersion Program (for students who are learning French as a second language), the Français Program (for students who speak French at home), and the Senior Years Technology Education Program. Depending on the demographics of certain communities, schools may offer other specialized programs to students, such as the English Hebrew Bilingual Program, or the Ukrainian Bilingual Program. Grade groupings consist of Early Years (Kindergarten to Grade 4), Middle Years (Grade 5 to Grade 8), and Senior Years (Grade 9 to Grade 12). Public schools in Manitoba must follow provincially mandated curricula.

At all grade levels, the ELA curriculum now focuses on the acquisition of language skills through reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing. Ideally, students are exposed to, and learn to produce a wide range of texts in the classroom, including digital, video and literary. The curriculum is designed to support learner-centered classroom activities and collaborative learning.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of the research was to enhance current understandings of the experiences of adolescents when reading self-selected and teacher-assigned texts. I was particularly interested in student perceptions of different types of texts and of the ways in which texts are selected. By focusing on the adolescent perspective, I attempted to investigate the difference in reading motivation that occurs when middle years students are able to choose their own reading materials versus assigned reading. I also asked students to describe the motives they feel their teachers have for assigning certain texts, and what benefits they may enjoy as a result.

My goal was to extend previous research conducted in early years to senior years classrooms. Educators have believed for many years that giving students the opportunity to select their own reading material may help to foster positive reading attitudes (Farrell, 1982; Heller, 1940; LaBrant, 1936; Langford & Allen, 1983; Manning & Manning, 1984; Sadoski, 1984; Worthy, 1996b; Worthy, 2002; Worthy et al., 1998). Further to this, when students are interested in what they are reading, they can surpass the supposed extent of their reading abilities (Fink, 1995-96, 2006; Hunt, 1996-97). However, a greater understanding of the adolescent perspective will address shortcomings in research in the area of text selection.

### **Research Questions**

With the above problem and purposes in mind, it was my intent to answer the following research questions:

1. What do adolescent readers have to say about reading self-selected texts in the classroom?
2. What do adolescent readers have to say about reading teacher-assigned texts in the classroom?
3. What implications do the responses to these questions have for reading instruction?

### *Overview of the Other Chapters*

This study focused on the experiences of a small group of adolescent students and their views on the ways texts are selected in their middle years ELA classroom. Through a review of the literature in Chapter 2, I was able to identify a gap in our current understandings of adolescent readers and teacher-assigned and self-selected text. Chapter 3 provides the reader with a background on the study's setting and participants, and describes how data were collected and analyzed. In Chapter 4, I describe the results of the study in terms of what students had to say about teacher-assigned and self-selected text, as well as sources of texts and after-reading activities. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss how the study findings are relevant to classroom teachers, in addition to current and future research. Limitations of the study are also discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews the professional and research literature regarding reading motivation, situated literacies, independent reading, and self-selected reading, highlighting the connections that exist between this literature and text selection. While there is both quantitative and qualitative research on text selection and reading motivation, the scope of this chapter focuses on qualitative research, particularly that which has implications for adolescent readers.

#### *Reading Motivation*

In the 1980s, researchers tended to focus on the benefits of comprehension strategies such as accessing prior knowledge (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Garner, 1987; Pressley, Borkowski, & Schneider, 1987); however, it became apparent that students need not just the skills to read, but also the motivation to do so (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Paris & Oka, 1986). Gambrell (1996) defines the engaged reader as someone who chooses to read for different purposes, who uses prior knowledge to gain new understandings from texts, who uses strategies to decode texts, and who shares with others the process of constructing the meaning of texts. Voluntary reading plays an important role in determining whether or not adolescent readers are engaged. Unfortunately, many teachers of adolescents will attest that it is often difficult to get their students to read. Most children begin school with positive attitudes about reading and learning, but positive reading attitudes begin to decline as they continue with their schooling (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Gambrell & Marinak,

2009; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Shapiro & White, 1991). By the time they reach middle school, many students have especially negative reading attitudes (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Cline & Kretke, 1980; Ley, Schaer, & Dismukes, 1994; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Due to negative experiences with teacher-assigned reading, interest in reading outside of school may begin to decline with age (Greaney, 1980; Whitehead, Capey, Maddren, & Wellings, 1977). Therefore, text selection plays an important role in reading motivation.

Extrinsic rewards, such as pizza parties, or even the promise of high marks, do little to increase intrinsic motivation to read (Gambrell & Marinak, 2009; Worthy, 2000). In fact, this may cause students to believe that reading is worth doing only when the reader will be rewarded (Kohn, 1993), and may, therefore, decrease motivation to read (Gambrell & Marinak, 2009). For students to be motivated to read, they must read for personally significant reasons (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995), since it is only when students find value in their reading that they become engaged in the reading process (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1994; Wigfield, 2000). Instructional practices that ignore students' individual interests, or that encourage competition may negatively affect motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). When students are not personally motivated to read, they may begin to assume that the only reason for reading is to please the teacher by completing an assignment (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997). Many students will be motivated when they are given time to "just read" the books they select (Fisher, 2004; Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Worthy, Broadus, & Ivey, 2001). Learner-centered views have become popular in many classrooms; these views assume that if given the opportunity, students may engage in tasks for their own purposes, rather than merely to gain extrinsic rewards (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). However,

Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried (2001) report that intrinsic motivation declines as students progress from elementary to high school.

There are several factors that may lead to a child's willingness to read voluntarily: being read to by family members, reading role models, early reading proficiency, and availability of reading materials (Greaney & Hagerty, 1987; Morrow, 1983; Neuman, 1986; Thomson, 1987). Students tend to read more frequently when their classrooms are book-rich, the books are accessible to them, and when they are permitted to borrow these books for home reading (Morrow & Weinstein, 1982). In a recent study, Bryan (2009) identified 11 factors which appeared to contribute to the non-engagement of two students in a grade six classroom; these included limited attractive text options, an absence of classroom discussions about reading, often negative attitudes about reading, a low motivation to read, limited perceptions of the usefulness of reading, and a limited sense of being a part of a classroom. Unfortunately, the children who most need encouragement from their teachers because of a lack of reading role models, or comprehension struggles, are often neglected in favour of more proficient readers (Fisher & Ivey, 2006). Many middle school ELA teachers feel uncomfortable teaching reading directly either because they do not see it as their job, or because they feel that they do not have the proper training to do so successfully (Bintz, 1997; Gee & Forrester, 1988).

Classroom environments that foster reading motivation have several common characteristics: a teacher who models reading, a well-stocked classroom library, student choice in text-selection, time for reading, collaborative activities around books, and literacy-based incentives for reading (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). Worthy and McKool (1996) demonstrated that reluctant adolescent readers are likely to feel encouraged

to read when they are given choice, as personally engaging reading material promotes voluntary reading (Bergin & La Fave, 1998; Fink, 1995-1996, 2006; Rucker, 1982). In fact, students who dislike reading in school may read for interest at home (Bintz, 1993; Booth, 2006; Bryan, 2009; Worthy, 1998; Worthy et al., 1998); however, their at-home reading materials are often non-traditional types of text (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999).

Furthermore, the texts that middle students most like to read are difficult to find in school and classroom libraries (Bryan, 2009), often because they are deemed “inappropriate” by teachers and librarians (Worthy et al., 1999). Worthy and McKool (1996) found that most students preferred literature that would be considered unacceptable to teachers. However, this “unacceptable” literature often contains sophisticated plots, vocabulary and characters (Cramer, 1994). When they are denied their reading choices, students begin to think of reading as something that they are required to do, but that holds no relevance for them. Eventually, this disdain for in-school reading may cause students to give up voluntary reading altogether (Worthy, 1998; Worthy, 2002).

If teachers are going to assign texts, they need to expose students to material that will hook their interest (Worthy, 1996a), but there is often a gap between actual student reading preference and perceived student reading preference (Stoelfen-Fisher, 1990; Strang, 1946). Furthermore, this gap continues to widen as students progress through school (Thomson, 1987). Books judged by adults as quality literature may not accurately reflect students’ reading preferences (Genco, MacDonald, & Hearne, 1991). In other words, there is a difference between what children like to read and what adults think children like to read. Although some teachers believe that exposing students to “good writing” will benefit them, they may actually be doing their students a disservice. When we force students to read things

because we feel it will be “good for them,” we run the risk of turning students away from reading. Bryan (2010) uses the comparison of being forced to eat pumpkin because his parents felt it was “good for him.” Today, as an adult, he does not eat pumpkin.

Since teachers are often unaware of students’ reading preferences (McKinlay, 1990; Stoelfen-Fisher, 1990), they may be assigning texts that they assume students will enjoy, but will instead discourage them from reading. A book such as *Summer of my German Soldier* (Greene, 1973) may be loved by teachers, but is often hated by students (Worthy, 1998). Furthermore, teachers often feel pressure to expose students to award-winning books to prepare them for standardized tests and make up for perceived declining standards in ELA classrooms (Worthy, Broaddus, & Ivey, 2001). However, many adolescents do not lose interest in all reading, but just school assigned reading and teacher-selected texts: “reading per se is not the problem” (Bintz, 1993, p. 612). According to Bintz (1993), students feel that teacher-assigned reading is an imposition that gets in the way of what they really want to read.

### *Situated Literacies*

The definition of literacy changes depending on the environment in which one practices it. The New Literacy Studies (e.g., Barton, 1994; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 1996; Street, 1993, 1995) developed new understandings of literacies as situated. Literacy can be culturally or socially situated (Bruner, 1996), or situated in relation to a particular time or place (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000). These studies encourage one to consider literacy as a social, and not an individual, practice. As such, literacy must be positioned according to social institutions (Baron et al., 2000) and will change considerably over time

(Barton & Hall, 1999; Brandt, 2001; Tusting, 2000). As the context for my study was a traditional classroom in 2009, it is important that the understanding of literacy for this study be situated accordingly.

Heath (1982, 1983) carried out an ethnography of the literacy of two communities located only a few miles apart. Although both communities were located right next to each other in the south-eastern United States, their literacy practices were significantly different and reflected the characteristics of each community, as well as how deeply literacy is rooted in cultural context. Roadville was a white community; most people living there worked in the local textile mills and had done so for generations. Tracton was an African-American community. Most community members were working-class and found employment either through farming or, more recently, with the local mills. Heath identified the relationship between literacy practices in each community and overall lifestyle patterns, such as defined gender roles, raising children, and schooling. Heath discovered that these lifestyle patterns were notably different even though the two communities were located in close proximity.

Heath (1982) focused on the literacy practice of parents reading bedtime stories to their children. In Roadville, bedtime story reading was commonplace. The books that parents chose to share often focused on the learning of new information, such as alphabet books or Bible stories. The adults in Roadville felt that it was important for their children to develop reading fluency to ensure their success in both church and school. In Tracton, parents rarely read to their children and did not feel the need to play an important role in their children's education. However, children were included in daily life and exposed to adults' communication with one another. Although there was an absence of print material in the

home, with the exception of Sunday school reading materials, the children developed oral language abilities to make up for their lack of formal reading and writing skills.

One's identity as a reader is constructed through social interaction, often through the response one receives from others (Alvermann, 2001; Christian & Bloome, 2004). Collins and Blot (2003) found that reading identities are sometimes imposed on an individual rather than created, as certain types of literacy are more valued than others. For many years, the literacy of women in the home went unnoticed whereas the literacy of men in the workplace was recognized (Street, 1993). For example, the reading and writing that a doctor does on a daily basis was seen by society as more important than that of a housewife (Street, 1994). It is important for educators to ask themselves if the literacy practices in their classrooms "disempower some and empower others" (Cairney, 2000, p. 63). Author/librarian Patrick Jones (2005) recalls a time when he was disempowered by a librarian at a public library. When he asked if the library housed any wrestling magazines, the librarian's response was so negative at the "mere mention" of such reading material that Jones claims he "never went back" (p. 127). Students engage in literacy practices outside of the classroom that are important to them; unfortunately, this learning is often overlooked by their teachers (Moje, 2002). Allowing students to choose their own reading material can help to validate their identities as readers.

### *Independent Reading*

Literacy as a social practice does not require an interaction between two or more people. Even independent reading may be viewed as a social practice as the reading material is reflective of certain social and cultural contexts. In the 1960s, educators began to see the

value in allowing their students to read independently in the classroom (Hunt, 1996-97).

Some research suggests that in-class silent reading can motivate and encourage students to read voluntarily (Pilgreen & Krashen, 1993). However, the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) challenges these findings, having failed to uncover conclusive research evidence to support the claim that silent reading is beneficial to students.

In a survey of middle school students by Ivey and Broaddus (2001), silent reading time was reported as being students' favourite activity. Fisher (2004) also found that students enjoyed periods of in-class silent reading. Although the time allotted for silent reading was at one point quite rare (Allington, 1994; Morrow, 1991; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1982-1983), it is now common practice among many classroom teachers (Nagy, Campenni, & Shaw, 2000). However, some teachers may still feel uneasy when their students read silently during instructional time (Ivey & Broaddus, 2000). Nevertheless, Allington (1994) claims that short periods of reading time may prevent students from becoming engaged with books; therefore, it may be preferable for teachers to allow students longer periods of in-class reading time to foster a love of reading.

While there is some research to support the use of classroom silent reading, recent research by Bryan (2009) questions the practice as a "one-size-fits-all" approach that does *not* work for all students. While classroom reading time is important, Bryan suggests that accommodations should be made for those students for whom silent reading time is not time spent reading productively. Bryan suggests that, for some students, the stringently enforced emphasis on silence can create an environment that is not conducive to engagement in reading. He believes that some students will benefit by replacing sustained silent reading

time with in-class time in which students are able to share and discuss their reading in a collaborative, socially interactive setting.

For students who are not choosing to read voluntarily at home, it is even more important for them to spend time with texts at school. The ways texts are selected may influence the success of independent reading. However, the success of independent reading also depends upon how students respond to their books. Allowing students to share their reading in collaborative ways is effective (Gambrell, 2004; Manning & Manning, 1984; Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994; Sadoski, 1984). It is important for teachers to give students a chance to discuss what they are reading with their peers (Bryan, 2009). Worthy (1996a) states that providing this opportunity for group discussion may “provide a foundation for students to begin finding books on their own” (p. 128). When students share their reading experiences, they may, in fact, motivate one another to read. Research has shown that as students advance in their schooling, they are more inclined to listen to the recommendations of their peers over those of adults when it comes to reading material (Shore, 1968; Wendelin & Zinck, 1983; Worthy, 1996a). However, students will consider teacher suggestions when teachers demonstrate interest in the reading materials (Csikszentmihalyi & McCormack, 1986; Roetteger, 1980; Worthy & Turner, 1997; Worthy, 2002).

### *Self-selected Reading*

Choice plays an important role in motivating students, especially when motivating students to read (Bryan, 2010; Spaulding, 1992). When classroom activities are teacher-directed and texts are teacher-assigned, students are more likely to be defiant, and may reject these texts as a matter of principle, as they have no voice in selecting them (Bintz, 1993).

What may appear to be a student with a behavioural problem could simply be a student who is unable to engage with the activities and materials in the classroom. Thomson (1987) suggests that teachers provide students with the purpose behind teaching certain texts. In attempting to determine why a certain text must be taught, teachers may find that there really isn't a good reason at all. Furthermore, students are exposed to fewer books and actually read less over the course of a school year when teachers assign texts and lead whole-class novel studies (Fisher & Ivey, 2007; Ivey & Broaddus, 1999). Assigning the same book to an entire class of students seems not to be an effective way to motivate reading.

In a survey of over 1,700 grade six students from 23 different schools in the United States (Ivey & Broaddus, 1999), students associated their worst experiences with assigned reading. In the same survey, as well as in a different survey of 400 grade six students (Worthy et al., 1999), it was determined that scary stories, books about sports, comic books and magazines are among students' preferred reading material. However, according to Worthy et al. (2001), the responsibility of providing access to books will become more and more the classroom teacher's responsibility as school librarians retire and budget cuts mean they are not always replaced. Teachers must expose students to both high-quality literature and student-preferred 'pop' literature in order to "enhance development of reading, writing, content knowledge, thinking, and positive attitudes toward reading and learning" (p. 53). Ivey (1999) compiled case studies of three grade six students, finding that each student was complex as a reader with different needs, interests and reading levels. These students' motivation to read was largely dependent on the materials available and the context. When designing classroom activities and interacting with students, teachers must take into account the complexity as well as the increasingly diverse cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds of

their students (Nieto, 2000). Although there are some shared reading preferences among adolescents; for example, the *Twilight* (Meyer, 2006) series, teachers should avoid the “one-size-fits-all” approach when it comes to selecting reading material for students, as most adolescent readers have varied and individual tastes in reading material (Worthy, 2002). It is not surprising that students identified quality of materials and choice of reading materials as the greatest motivators for reading (Worthy et al., 1999).

Giving students the opportunity to select their own reading material may help foster positive reading attitudes in students (Farrell, 1982; Heller, 1940; Hunt, 1996-97; LaBrant, 1936; Langford & Allen, 1983; Manning & Manning, 1984; Sadoski, 1984; Worthy, 1996b; Worthy, 2002; Worthy et al., 1998). In a study by Worthy et al. (1998), grade six teachers identified four main barriers to self-selected reading. First, teachers felt pressure to cover the curriculum and improve test scores. Second, teachers felt as though they had to exert control over student reading choice to keep it connected to the curriculum and in the form of “quality” literature. Third, teachers felt that too many of their students, either because they were struggling readers or EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners, needed direct instruction, and this took precedence over in-class silent reading time. Finally, teachers reported that most students were unable to bring books from home, and that classroom budgets were not sufficient to stock classroom libraries with a variety of reading choices. In order to stock their classrooms with non-traditional reading materials, not mandated by the curriculum, many teachers had to ask for donations or purchase these materials themselves (Worthy, 1996b). However, it is worth noting that the research literature that I was able to locate regarding the availability of reading materials in the classroom describes the American experience. This may or may not be as problematic in Canadian schools.

Students are more likely to select books from a classroom library than any other source (Gambrell, 1996). Long ago, Russell (1941) found that students would read what is available to them; therefore, to encourage reading, teachers must provide a diverse library of high-interest texts for students (Bryan, 2009; Worthy, 1996b). In terms of enjoyment, in a study by Gambrell et al. (1996), the researchers found that 80% of children most enjoyed the books that they had been permitted to choose from their classroom libraries. Only 10% of students from the same study mentioned books that had been teacher-assigned.

Unfortunately, school libraries, especially those in low socio-economic areas, are often most affected by budget cuts (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1993). Furthermore, Thomson (1987) found that few students acquire their texts from the public library. This makes it all the more important for students to be able to find high-interest reading material in school and classroom libraries. Unfortunately, reading materials that are interesting to students are not always readily available at school (Bryan, 2009; Worthy & McKool, 1996).

Although much time and effort in schools is devoted to promoting early literacy, the issue of adolescent literacy is often ignored in “educational policy, school curricula, and . . . public mindset” (Vacca, 1998, p. 605). According to Biancarosa and Snow (2004), 70% of adolescent readers struggle to comprehend literary texts. However, Allington (1994) contends that reading inexperience may be confused with reading inability. Atwell (2007) argues that, if our students are engaged, it is not necessary to teach comprehension directly. The seven comprehension strategies (Pearson, 1985; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992) commonly used by many ELA teachers may negatively affect the reading experience for our students: “a reader could become as proficient as hell according to the list but never ever enter the reading zone – never become immersed in a great story . . . dream, laugh, despair,

celebrate, understand, wonder, or fall in love” (Atwell, 2007, p. 54). In fact, interesting and relevant reading materials may engage even students who have not yet mastered the English language (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007).

The more students read, the better equipped they are to decode and decipher complicated texts (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Atwell, 2007). Stanovich (1986) found that differences in time spent reading caused students to experience “Matthew effects.” This term is used to describe the gap between students who successfully acquire early reading skills and those who do not. This gap in ability widens as these students continue on in school; those who first exhibited reading difficulties will read less, and as a result their reading will not improve. This will also affect these students’ success in subjects such as social studies or science where they are required to read and understand complicated informational text. Research has linked the time spent reading to proficiency in both reading and writing (Atwell; Greaney, 1980; Mullis, Campbell, & Farstrup, 1993; Wilson, 1981).

Texts that contain simple vocabulary and plot structures may help students to become more fluid readers and to give them the confidence to attempt more sophisticated texts (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Dorrell & Carroll, 1981; Parrish & Atwood, 1985). Ujiie and Krashen (1996) found that seventh-grade boys who read comic books regularly are more likely to enjoy reading and read more in general. Some comic books and graphic novels may have sophisticated plots and themes. For example, in *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, Spiegelman (1986) uses a visual format to tell the story of his father’s experiences during the Holocaust. Also, in *Skim* (Tamaki & Tamaki, 2008), short-listed for the Governor General’s Award, the authors depict delicate and sensitive issues including suicide, homosexuality and witchcraft.

It is often frustrating for teachers when students refuse to leave their areas of interest, selecting seemingly the same books over and over. Nonetheless, teachers may expand students' interests through engaging instruction and motivating materials (Schiefele, 1999). Worthy and Sailors (2001) found that once students have the experience of connecting with reading materials that interest them, they may be more inclined to try different genres of text. The type of book that causes students to get in the "reading zone" (Atwell, 2007) is sometimes referred to as a *home run* text (Kim & Krashen, 2000; Ujiie & Krashen, 2002; Von Sprecken, Kim, & Krashen, 2000). Once a child falls in love with a book and has a positive reading experience, it is more likely that s/he will continue to read for pleasure.

Research has shown that students make more progress when they read books at their reading level (Allington, 2000); however, asking students to select text based on difficulty alone limits their choices dramatically and may result in resistant readers (Worthy & Sailors, 2001). In a study by Sailors, Worthy, Asaf, and Mast (2000), students were awarded points for reading books at their grade level, and completing computer-based comprehension tests. The points could then be used to purchase external rewards. The researchers found that since students had to stay within "their level," they chose books that would award them the most points. In contrast to this, however, when students read outside of the program, they talked about choosing books for content and interest. In fact, most students are intellectually capable of reading, but are not motivated to do so (Irving, 1980; Morrow, 1991; Spiegel, 1981). Research has shown that when students are interested in certain reading material, they may surpass their teacher's expectations of reading level (Fink, 1995-96, 2006; Hunt, 1996-97). According to Fink (2006), motivation may enable them even to overcome learning

disabilities, such as dyslexia. Moreover, students may make more of an effort to learn and understand the material found in the texts they select due to interest (Schiefele, 1999).

After an in-depth study of four students, Kos (1991) concluded that these students wanted to improve their reading abilities, but felt as though they were unable to do so in their current school environments. It is no surprise, then, that struggling readers' self-concept is also much lower than that of proficient readers (Gambrell et al., 1996). Resistant and struggling readers are in most need of personally engaging reading material (Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Turner, & Prater, 1997). When teachers assign whole class novel studies, there is no way to ensure that the book is at the appropriate reading level for all students. In fact, many struggling readers are never exposed to books that they are actually capable of reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 1999). If students are not capable of comprehending the text, they claim that they "hate reading" or that the book is "boring" (Auciello, 2003). Somewhat surprisingly, the reading material that students self-select is often more complex than teacher-assigned material (Worthy, 1998), as students tend to use more sophisticated strategies for self-selected reading than they would use for teacher-assigned reading (Bintz, 1993). Even proficient readers often dislike the books their teachers select (Ivey, 1999). In fact, students may feel that they can "get away" with not reading, and still achieve adequate marks on their assignments (Worthy, 1998). If students are able to complete assignments using low-level strategies instead of high-level ones, they might put forth the least amount of effort (Metsala, Sweet, & Guthrie, 1996).

*Summary of this Literature Review*

The review of literature concerning reading motivation reveals that student interest in reading material has a significant positive effect on adolescent readers in terms of attitude, self-concept and academic progress. In light of the New Literacy Studies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), literacy is viewed as a situated practice. One such situated practice widely incorporated into ELA classes is independent reading. This has also been shown to motivate readers when it is used effectively, including permitting self-selection of texts and opportunities to discuss reading with peers. Although previous research supports the claim that self-selection of texts positively impacts motivation and the success of independent reading programs, there is little research to explore how students view teacher motivations for assigning certain texts, and the ways in which these texts may benefit them. In much of the research literature, the voice of the adolescent reader is excluded. Understanding the adolescent perspective allows teacher-assigned and/or self-selected texts to be situated in the greater context of independent adolescent in-school reading.

## CHAPTER 3

### Method

This chapter describes the approach and methods that guided the study, including the study setting; participants; data collection, analysis and interpretation. The nature of the study was well suited to a qualitative method of exploration, allowing insight into real-life situations and experiences. Prior to data collection, the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board granted ethical approval for this study (Appendix A).

#### *The Study Setting*

The setting for this study was a nursery to grade 8 (N-8) school in Winnipeg. To conduct the semi-structured interviews with the students, I chose a private and quiet location within the school where the students would feel comfortable, and where the chance that their responses would be overheard or the interviews interrupted was minimal. I also conversed with the classroom teacher, and I made field notes of my observations of the study-setting classroom.

#### *The School*

The school in which this study was set is one of the largest N-8 schools in the province of Manitoba, with a population of over 1,000 students. It is a dual-track school; therefore, parents have the option of placing their children in an early immersion program in kindergarten. The student population is culturally diverse. Many new Canadians arriving

from the Philippines enroll their children at this school. The class sizes in junior high currently range from 30-32 students. This is in large part due to the fact that the school has a positive reputation in the community. Many families living outside the catchment area request that their children be enrolled in the school.

The large majority of the students attending this school are from middle-class homes; however, there is also low-income housing within the catchment area. As well, there is a small percentage of students in government care. Veteran teachers have mentioned a slight increase in behavioural challenges over the years, as well as an increasing need to provide additional academic support to students. This is further evidenced by declining divisional ELA and math exam scores over the past five years. In general, however, there is a small number of students in each classroom who require an adapted education plan, and the principal estimates there being only six out-of-school suspensions per year. As a whole, students at this school tend to score higher than the divisional average on the math and ELA exams in grade 8. The school is known for excellence in athletics, and has a reputable music program. Individual students and student teams regularly win provincial and divisional sports championships, and the school choir and band also frequently win competitions.

### *The Teacher*

Tracey is a well-respected teacher at the school in which the study was set. As with all of the names used in this report, *Tracey* is a pseudonym. This is Tracey's second year teaching ELA at the school; however, she has been teaching for 15 years. Prior to this teaching assignment, she taught at other middle schools in the division, and also held a math and social studies position at her current school. Although she completed a degree in early

years education, the principal of her previous school thought she would be a good fit for junior high and assigned her to the grade 8 ELA classroom. She feels that ELA is not her specialty; in spite of this, Tracey has collaborated on several professional development committees with an ELA focus. She also incorporates ELA into her social studies curriculum, concentrating on reading comprehension and writing activities.

Tracey considers herself to be a life-long reader and shares a love of books and reading with her students. It is also evident that she cares about her students and spends time reflecting on her teaching practices and contemplating how she can improve as an educator. Tracey's goal in using literature in her classroom is to get students interested in reading. Tracey has an extensive classroom library for her students, including magazines, graphic novels, and the latest in adolescent literature. At the beginning of the academic year, her students complete a reading survey, which asks students about their reading preferences, interests, and books they have previously read. Tracey waits until after she has compiled the results of this survey before she purchases new books for her classroom library.

Tracey identifies strongly with her students as learners, and expresses a desire to keep things new and exciting in her classroom so that neither she nor her students will become bored. She tends to spend a lot of time outside of the classroom planning and creating new units in order to maintain that enthusiasm.

### *The Classroom*

Tracey's classroom is a large, bright and comfortable space. She has students' tables arranged in a semi-circle formation. Her desk and computer are located at the back of the room. When students are in the classroom, Tracey spends her time circulating and helping

individual students. Also, there was a student teacher in Tracey's classroom during a portion of the study. Tracey is part of a two-teacher team. She is responsible for teaching ELA and social studies for two classes, and her teaching partner teaches science and math. Tracey and her teaching partner also have regularly scheduled resource periods, allowing them to teach collaboratively, and work with individual students or small groups who require extra help.

All of the study participants are in the same ELA class. Tracey teaches this class ELA for eight 55-minute periods over a six-day cycle; the study participants have at least one period of ELA on each school day. Tracey allows students one period per cycle to read a self-selected text. She will sometimes permit students to read magazines; however, recently she has been focusing on reading log responses. As a result, students must select a novel for independent reading time. Tracey finds that students often struggle to write meaningful responses in their reading logs, opting instead for plot summaries. She asks them to submit one reading log entry per cycle, and responds personally to each student, posing questions that will encourage more thoughtful entries. She also uses whole class novel study and literature circle units in her classroom. The class is currently reading *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001). The during and after-reading activities during this unit range from artistic interpretations to class discussions.

### *Participants*

The students who participated in this study were all from the same grade 8 ELA classroom; however, the class from which students were selected was diverse. One male and four female students participated in this study. Their teacher confirmed that all study participants were performing at or above grade level and came from middle-class homes.

Three of the students were Caucasian, one of the study participants immigrated to Canada from the Philippines with her family, and another participant was Métis. Therefore, there was some diversity among the study participants in terms of culture, religion and background.

### *Participant Selection*

I explained the study to two classes of grade 8 students from the same school, and then invited their participation. The classes consisted of 31 and 32 students respectively. I read the same script (Appendix B) to both classes when requesting students' involvement in the study.

Between the two classes, approximately 15 students expressed interest in the study. Because the study participants involved in this study were aged 13 years, and have not yet reached the age of consent, letters of consent (Appendix C) were sent home to parents of these students. Students were told that study participants would be selected randomly from those who returned their signed consent forms (Appendix D). Only five students returned their forms. Since I did not provide the students with a return date, I waited several days for more consent forms to be returned. At that point, after receiving no additional forms, I informed the five students that they had been selected to participate. The five study participants were also asked to indicate their assent to their involvement in the study (Appendix E).

During the period of data collection, however, I was approached by several students who expressed their disappointment that they could not participate because they had forgotten to return their signed consent forms in time. Although I obtained permission from

the school division (Appendix F) to seek volunteers from two different schools, I found that there was sufficient student interest in the first school.

Although no honorarium was offered to students, I organized a pizza lunch for the study participants at the end of data collection.

### *Number of Participants*

A small sample size was chosen for this study. As such, I was able to focus on a small group of students in the hopes of gaining an in-depth understanding of their school reading experiences. Originally, I hoped to recruit between three to five volunteers. As five students brought back their signed consent forms and seemed enthusiastic about taking part in the study, I decided to select all five students to participate. This number of study participants enabled me to learn about each student as a reader, while still comparing and contrasting their responses.

### *Participant Descriptions*

*Andrew*, like the other names assigned to study participants in this report, is a pseudonym. Andrew is a friendly boy who is popular among the students at his school. He is proud of his Métis heritage, and close with his four siblings. Andrew's preferred hobbies are skateboarding and texting. His teacher described him as an average student who often arrives to class late and is absent from school.

Lena is a quiet and reflective girl who is described by her teacher as being a good student. She works hard and displays respectful behaviour in class. Both of her parents are professionals and supportive of her academic achievements as well as her extracurricular

activities. Her teacher mentioned that her mother regularly attends parent/teacher interviews, and gets off work early to watch Lena play on the school's sports teams.

Jenica's family moved to Canada from the Philippines in 2005. Both of her parents are professionals who push their daughter to succeed academically. When she began school in Winnipeg, she was placed in the wrong grade, so after she completed grade six, she was transferred directly to grade 8 for a more age-appropriate setting. Her teacher described her as a dedicated student who sometimes takes school too seriously. Although Jenica's first language is not English, she now speaks and reads English fluently.

Veronica is an outgoing and popular girl in the school. She is passionate about dance and spends several evenings each week in dance classes. Veronica has a younger stepbrother who is autistic. Her teacher mentioned that she can display disruptive behaviour in class, and sometimes has a negative attitude. In spite of this, she tends to obtain high marks in her courses. Her teacher was surprised that Veronica volunteered for the study.

Rebecca was described by her teacher as being a top student in the class. She is an only child and her mother is an elementary school teacher. Although Rebecca achieves high marks in ELA, her favourite subject is math. In grade 7, she won the school's Citizenship Academic Participation (CAP) award, suggesting that she excels in all aspects of her school life.

### *Procedure*

I chose which students would read an assigned or self-selected text by drawing their names randomly. Two of the five study participants were asked to select any "school appropriate" reading material of their choice (obviously excluding things such as

pornography). Although I told these students that texts such as magazines or comic books would be acceptable, both students decided to read books for the study. One study participant selected *Tales of a Reluctant Psychic: The Freak, Visions, and Far* (Matas, 2009), and the other picked *Innercity Girl Like Me* (Bernardo, 2007). I assigned the remaining three study participants one of the following books: *The Heaven Shop* (Ellis, 2004), *Heck Superhero* (Leavitt, 2004) or *The Crazy Man* (Porter, 2005). These novels were selected because I have read and enjoyed each novel, students in my classes in previous years have enjoyed these books, the books somewhat represent a range of difficulty levels, and they appeal to a range of reading interests. Moreover, each book has been recognized for its literary merit in that, amongst other things, they were all short-listed for the Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Award (MYRCA). Finally, reading and response to literature meets the outcomes of the Manitoba grade 8 language arts curriculum.

Study participants were asked to complete their reading (either teacher-assigned or self-selected) during in-class independent reading time. The students were allowed two weeks to finish reading the assigned or self-selected text, as I felt this was sufficient time for students to complete their reading material. After reading the text, each student completed a face-to-face interview with me. The interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis. It was important during the interview process to try to develop a rapport with study participants so that they would feel comfortable giving honest and informative responses to the various interview questions.

### *Data Collection*

In literacy research, students' voices are often missing from studies even though their thoughts and opinions are valued (Alvermann, 1998; Hinchman, 1998). Furthermore, previous research on reading motivation has often relied on student surveys (e.g. Gambrell et al., 1996; McKenna & Kear, 1990). I decided to use interviews as the method of data collection, as I wanted to collect descriptive data in students' own words (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The interview guide was structured upon general themes from the literature, such as those pertaining to students' reading attitudes (Farrell, 1982; Heller, 1940; Hunt, 1996-97; LaBrant, 1936; Langford & Allen, 1983; Manning & Manning, 1984; Sadoski, 1984; Worthy, 1996b; Worthy, 2002; Worthy et al., 1998), the disparity between student reading motivation in regards to student-selected and teacher-assigned text (Bintz, 1993; Booth, 2006; Bryan, 2009; Worthy, 1998; Worthy et al., 1998), availability of reading materials (Worthy & McKool, 1996), and reader identity (Alvermann, 2001; Christian & Bloome, 2004). The interview guide was adapted from Ivey and Broaddus's (2001) survey of middle school students' reading preferences.

In this study, study participants were asked to give specific examples about their past reading experiences, and also to discuss the book that they read for the purposes of the study. For example, one of the requests in the interview was, "Tell me about the worst reading experience you've had in an ELA class. Tell me about the best experience." The experience described here served to paint a more complete picture of the participant as a reader. I used students' responses as a starting point from which I could explore more fully their feelings in regards to teacher-assigned and self-selected text. This style of questioning was repeated

throughout the interview as other specific examples of the student's reading experience were shared.

The interview guide (Appendix G) contained 10 main questions. The first question of the interview contained four parts. One participant struggled to respond to more than one of the four parts; for example, "What do you see as the teacher's reason/purpose for allowing you to choose your own texts?" and "What do you think are the benefits to you of the teacher allowing you to select your own texts to read?" When it became clear that a participant was not likely to offer further information without assistance, I repeated or rephrased the question, and asked probing questions. Whenever possible, I remained silent in order to prompt study participants to continue on their own. I often rephrased students' comments to ensure I correctly understood what they were telling me. On several occasions, study participants gave an answer to one of the questions that they had previously been unable to answer. For example, when asked the question, "When you were reading, what connections could you make? (to other texts, movies, real-life experiences, etc.)," Jenica replied that she could not make any connections; however, later in the interview, she was able to describe connections she made without directly being asked to do so.

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

Face-to-face interviews were held with all five of the study participants. Study participants received a copy of the interview guide (Appendix G) prior to the interview. This was done to allow the students' time to reflect upon their experiences, and to facilitate more meaningful, insightful responses. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

The interviews were semi-structured. Therefore, although I formulated a list of 10 questions in advance to ask each participant, I also asked additional questions depending on the participant's responses within the theme of reading. Consequently, the interviews were flexible, and differed somewhat in length. As I do not teach the study participants, all of the students seemed comfortable in giving honest responses about their experiences with reading in school. Some of the study participants gave more detailed responses than others. After the first two interviews, I noticed that the study participants had tended to give one-word answers as a result of the way I worded additional questions. As a result, I gave more instruction at the beginning of the next three interviews. I emphasized to each participant that I would not be judging their responses, and was interested in hearing their opinions. I also asked each participant to be as detailed as possible with each response.

Following the interview, each participant received a copy of the interview transcript for purposes of verification and clarification. During this member checking, none of the students made any changes to their interview transcript, nor did they request that any information be removed. All of the students' parents indicated permission on the consent form to use direct quotations from their children's interviews.

### *Data Analysis*

During the research process, I read and re-read the transcripts in order to identify both similarities and differences between the students' responses. By re-reading the transcripts before the interview process was completed, I was able to identify ways in which I could improve as an interviewer.

Before I began the analysis of the data, I re-read each transcript while listening to the corresponding audio-recorded interview. I made note of possible themes and noted the ways the interviews compared and contrasted. Themes emerged as I listened to and re-read the transcripts. I began identifying themes by highlighting specific words or phrases that corresponded with key concepts in the research literature (such as teacher-assigned reading not holding a student's interest). These words and phrases were then used to label common themes for all the interview transcripts. I used idea units (Kontos, 1981) as the unit of analysis, focusing on what I interpreted to be the various ideas that the students were expressing. It was possible for several themes to be included within a single utterance and so, rather than coding by utterance (or talk turn), the transcripts were coded according to each separate idea.

Every interview was analyzed and coded in the order in which it was conducted. Codes were assigned to represent each theme. When I discovered a new theme in a later interview, I re-read the previously coded interviews to establish if the new theme could be applied. Furthermore, after having coded later interviews, it was sometimes necessary for certain transcripts to be recoded for better fit. With the help of my thesis advisor, I was able to finalize the themes that would appear in my final paper.

Category labels were devised to describe the main themes emerging from the data. These category labels are presented and discussed in Table 1 (Appendix H) and Table 2 (Appendix I). In Table 1, I provide a description and example of each of my categories and what I have called sub-categories. The sub-categories are used to provide a comparison between what the students said about teacher-assigned and self-selected reading. For example, in Table 1, a category is *awareness of teacher motivation*. The related sub-

categories are *teacher-assigned* and *self-selected*, meaning the students' awareness of the teacher's motivations for assigning some books and awareness of the teacher's motivations for allowing self-selection of some books. In Tables 1 and 2, the example provided contains some highlighted text. This highlighted text is the specific idea unit being referred to as the example. Any other text that is included helps to provide some context to the example. In Table 2, I explain why I chose each example and I provide an explanation of how that example illustrates each of my categories and sub-categories.

One of the categories that appears in Tables 1 and 2 is *other*. This category encompassed any theme apart from those themes appearing in Tables 1 and 2. As I analyzed and coded the transcripts, I initially employed extra category headings such as *reader's identity*, *social chatter*, or other such things. I also identified additional utterances that I was unable to categorize. To facilitate data analysis and reporting of findings, I chose to include only those themes that I believed would best enable me to answer the research questions. In Tables 1 and 2 and in the remaining tables presented in this report, I include specifics of only the most common, and what I deemed to be the most important themes across the five interviews. For ease of data management, I have collapsed the remaining categories under the broad category heading of *other*.

In Tables 1 and 2, an example and explanation are also provided for the *text origin* and *reading response methods* categories. These categories are discussed further in Chapter 4, where the relevant results are presented in connection with these categories.

After I identified all of the categories and refined the coding system through my own analysis, an independent researcher and I together conducted an analysis of the transcript of one of the audiotape recorded semi-structured interviews. After this transcript was coded, we

then separately conducted an analysis and coding of a second interview transcript. When this analysis was completed, we met again to compare and contrast our findings in order to establish rater reliability.

There were a total of 131 idea units in the transcript selected for individual analysis. Of those 131 units, the independent researcher and I agreed upon the classification of 109 of those units, for a percentage of agreement of 83.2%. There were a total of 17 possible categories for each idea unit; therefore, this is a high percentage of agreement.

I looked back at those places in the interview transcript where there existed disagreement in our coding. For the 22 idea units in question, the independent researcher and I explained our reasons for assigning the code that we did. Through discussion, we were able to come to agreement in all cases where we initially did not agree.

In addition to the audio recording of the interviews, during and after the interviews, I recorded notes on the study participants' body language and facial expressions during our conversations. These notes might have provided information that could not be recorded on the audio recording device. When I analyzed these field notes, I discovered that I had not recorded any extreme behaviours. Given my focus was on what the students *said*, and given there was no episode of extreme behaviour or a behaviour that I deemed shed extra light on my recorded conversations, these field note data were not included in my study report.

#### *Summary of this Method Chapter*

The experiences of adolescents when reading teacher-assigned and self-selected texts were explored through the use of semi-structured interviews. Students talked about their reading experiences. Five students (one male, four female) were recruited from the same

ELA classroom to participate in a face-to-face interview lasting approximately half an hour. A comfortable and private interview location was selected to best ensure study participants' comfort and confidentiality. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

After the interview transcripts were coded, I reviewed my analysis and decided to discuss the results in relation to four main themes: a) what the students said about teacher-assigned reading; b) what the students said about self-selected reading; c) sources of students' preferred texts; and d) students' preferred ways of responding to reading. These four themes were predominant throughout the study participants' interview responses, and I concluded that this was the best and most accurate way to organize and present my results in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

## Results

In this chapter, key findings are presented using quotations to reveal the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of the five study participants interviewed for this research. The findings are organized according to four categories identified through analysis: a) what students said about teacher-assigned reading; b) what students said about self-selected reading; c) sources of students' preferred texts; and d) students' preferred ways of responding to reading. Sub-categories and the associated number of idea units identified are presented in Tables 3-5. The sub-categories and idea units for the first two main categories are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3  
*Students' Opinions about Teacher-assigned and Self-selected Text*

Idea Category	Teacher-assigned	Self-selected
Awareness of teacher motivation	17	13
Positive judgment	74	82
Negative judgment	47	9
Perceived benefits	21	22
Book content	30	58
Connections	31	19
Sub Total	220	203
Other	202	
Total number of idea units	625	

### *What the Students Said About Teacher-assigned Reading*

Although the positive comments students made about teacher-assigned and self-selected text were almost equal in number (74 and 82 respectively), there was a large disparity between the negative comments students made. In total, there were 47 negative judgments about teacher-assigned reading, and only nine about self-selected reading.

As I could not divide the study participants evenly into two groups, three of the five students (Rebecca, Andrew and Lena) were assigned books for the study. The remaining two students (Veronica and Jenica) were asked to choose their own reading material; both girls chose a novel. Students were put into the assigned or self-selected reading group randomly. I did not purposely designate more study participants for the assigned reading group. The students' comments were not restricted only to talking about the group to which they were assigned. As such, although there was not an equal distribution of study participants to the two groups, this did not appear to distort the study findings.

### *Teacher Motivations and Perceived Benefits*

The study participants expressed an understanding that there is value in teacher-assigned text. There were a total of 17 idea units in relation to awareness of teacher motivation, and 21 in relation to perceived benefits to students, which is quite low in comparison to other categories. The study participants stated that teacher-assigned text is a way to expand students' interests in books (Jenica) and expose students to more books and new genres (Andrew), or as a way to teach students a new topic (Veronica), even referring to cross-curricular connections with social studies (Veronica, Rebecca, Lena). Lena and Rebecca, in particular, were able to see teacher-assigned reading as instrumental in

developing cross-curricular learning, giving the examples of specific topics in social studies, such as early humans and poverty.

The comparison of idea units about the perceived benefits to students of self-selected and teacher-assigned text was almost identical in number (22 and 21 respectively). The study participants saw teacher-assigned text as a way for teachers to expose students to a range of valuable reading materials that they would otherwise not encounter, and might actually enjoy. Veronica felt that “if [the teacher] can’t select the book for you, you might never get to read it.” Lena saw teacher-assigned text as a way for teachers to transmit information to students that they are required to learn. For Andrew, the benefits of teacher-assigned text were clear to him; he was not required to select his own book. He said that he has faith in his teachers to choose a book that he will like, rather than assigning a book based on familiarity or availability of copies.

#### *Positive Comments About Teacher-assigned Text*

Somewhat surprisingly, the students made positive comments about teacher-assigned text. In general, the students seemed to have had encouraging experiences with the books their teachers have assigned them in the past. Andrew, specifically, spoke highly of the majority of his past encounters with teacher-assigned reading material largely due to his negative experiences with self-selected text and frustration in choosing his own books: “instead of reading like ten different books to find out what you want, you can just read this one the teacher gave you.” Andrew expressed a great deal of trust in his teachers to choose books that would be enjoyable to students. However, when teachers have assigned him books in the past that he did not find interesting, Andrew stated that he often stopped reading them.

For the study, Lena was assigned the book *Heck Superhero* (Leavitt, 2004). She stated that she enjoyed the book because it reminded her in some ways of her favourite genre, fantasy. She also told me that she could connect with the relationship the main character had with his best friend. However, she claimed that “ it doesn’t have to be the genre that I like, but I still like it. ” Lena’s interest in reading seems largely dependent on the book. Although she is capable of enjoying books outside of her preferred genre, she also stated that the book the class is currently reading for novel study, *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001), hasn’t “gotten” her yet.

The three students (Rebecca, Lena, Andrew) who read teacher-assigned texts all claimed to have had positive reading experiences with the books I assigned to them for this study. Although both Rebecca and Lena stated that they enjoyed their texts, they also admitted that they would not have chosen these books for themselves, as they are not part of the fantasy genre that both girls are drawn to when choosing a book. Andrew admitted to having read the book he was assigned, *The Heaven Shop* (Ellis, 2004), several times previously. He told me that this is one of his favourite books.

Four of the five study participants had the same grade 7 ELA teacher last year, and all four spoke enthusiastically about *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2001), a novel they were assigned. Three of the four study participants stated that they found the content of the book interesting, and all four described the positive experiences they had with the activities they completed around the book. These activities ranged from group reading to written and artistic response. Jenica, the one student who was not in the same grade 7 class as the others, enthusiastically described two teacher-assigned novels as positive reading experiences. Both novels fell into the genre of historical fiction, particularly the Holocaust. Jenica reported that she prefers a

“mix” when it comes to text selection: “just sometimes the teacher picks books that you like a lot, but then you didn’t think you would like it.”

### *Negative Comments About Teacher-assigned Text*

Rebecca and Jenica, students who were reported by their teacher as being two of the strongest students in the class, made the most negative comments about teacher-assigned reading. Jenica stated that if a teacher assigns a book, she’ll complete it even if she doesn’t like it because “it’s . . . reading material, and I just like to read. So even if I don’t enjoy it, I like to find out how it ends.” Jenica attributed her worst reading experience to *Polar Bears Past Bedtime* (Osborne, 1998) from the *Magic Tree House* series, not entirely because of the books themselves, but also due to the during-reading activities students were asked to complete, such as group work and discussion. Rebecca was more critical of the books her teacher has chosen for read-alouds, and claimed that teacher-assigned books rarely fall into the genre that she likes (fantasy).

Lena and Andrew described negative past experiences with novel studies, in particular, a lack of interest due to the subject matter of the book. Lena stated that her teachers would sometimes “pick a book that I wouldn’t really get into, and I would just start drifting off, and not really pay attention.” Both students stated that the content of the assigned text affected both their understanding and enjoyment.

Both Veronica and Lena said that they are not enjoying *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001), the novel study they are currently completing with their class; however, Veronica stated that it is common for her to have trouble “getting into” a book. In spite of her reputation within the school of having a negative attitude, Veronica made few negative

comments about reading (either teacher-assigned or self-selected), unless directly prompted to do so.

### *Content and Connections*

I identified a total of 58 idea units in relation to the content of self-selected texts as opposed to 30 idea units about the content of teacher-assigned texts, which is of interest considering that three of the five study participants read a teacher-assigned text for the study. When asked why they liked their teacher-assigned book, Andrew and Lena described the book's content. Andrew gave the following justification for his enjoyment of his teacher-assigned novel:

I found it good because she had a really good life, and then suddenly she had to move away, like people were dying in her family and . . . she owned a coffin shop, called The Heaven Shop . . . and they closed it down, and then when she moved with her grandma, she ended up making money to build a new one.

In contrast to this, however, I identified 19 idea units about the connections the study participants made to self-selected texts as opposed to 31 idea units about the connections to teacher-assigned texts. The three study participants who read teacher-assigned texts for this study all said they were able to connect with their novels on some level, either through personal experience (Lena), film (Rebecca) or another text (Andrew).

### *What the Students Said About Self-selected Reading*

Two students, Jenica and Veronica, read self-selected books for the study; however, the remaining three students also discussed what they like and dislike about choosing their own books.

### *Teacher Motivations and Perceived Benefits*

I identified 13 idea units in relation to awareness of teacher motivation, and 22 idea units in relation to perceived benefits to students. Veronica was initially unable to identify a reason why a teacher would allow students to choose their own texts. When pressed, however, she said the following, “So you can read books that you’re interested in and . . . the book might be boring. You can start a different book if you don’t like it.” All students seemed to agree that self-selected books reflect students’ interests. Therefore, students are encouraged to read, and their enjoyment in reading is developed: “you get to . . . read different material than what they would assign in class. They might not assign some kind of vampire book in class, but then you like reading those” (Rebecca).

Lena described self-selected reading as “something that interests me, and not what the teacher thinks I should read, but whatever suits me best.” All five students stated that reading books that interest them is the greatest benefit of self-selected reading; however, three students (Lena, Veronica, Jenica) also emphasized this type of reading as instrumental in learning something personally interesting to the student. Jenica stated that with self-selected reading, “we learn more about what we want to learn.” Finally, Andrew and Rebecca stated that allowing students to choose their own books would improve reading motivation, in that

students would choose to read books that they enjoy. Andrew made a clear distinction between the benefits of self-selected texts versus those that are teacher-assigned: “you enjoy your book that you read and if your teacher assigns you a book you don’t like, then you won’t want to read, and then you just lose interest in reading.”

### *Positive Comments About Self-selected Text*

Both Andrew and Lena mentioned that finding a genre that is interesting to the individual student is the most important factor in developing a love for reading. Furthermore, both students stated that they enjoy rereading their favourite books. One of the first books that hooked Andrew was *April Raintree* (Culleton, 1995). Andrew stated that students who dislike reading need to find a book they like and “stay on that genre.” During the interview, Andrew revealed that he enjoys books about foreign countries and books with characters that go through “struggles.” Andrew spoke enthusiastically about the books he had read so far this year, and proudly identified himself as a reader. At one point he held up the book that I had assigned to him, exclaiming “I read this instead of watching T.V.”

Lena is a former reluctant reader who developed a love of reading after discovering the *Twilight* (Meyer, 2006) series: “I first didn’t really like reading, but once I found . . . a certain genre that I liked, I got more and more into it.” She claimed that before reading a book from the fantasy genre, she would avoid reading “at all costs.” Lena has now branched out to other authors and series within the genre, listing L.J. Smith and the *Marked* (Cast & Cast, 2007) series as among her favourites. She said that she prefers independent reading because she can pick her own book, and finds it easier to finish the book: “if I’m really getting into them . . . it takes me . . . three days maybe.”

Rebecca talked about the importance of trying new books to discover a preferred genre. Like Lena, Rebecca said that she favours the fantasy genre. She stated that she likes to read vampire books, and referred to *Evermore* (Noël, 2009) as one of her favourites. She told me that she prefers selecting her own book to having it assigned to her because there are more options; she also mentioned reading the blurbs of books that look interesting and picking the book she likes best.

Jenica stated that she enjoys reading historical fiction and nonfiction about the Holocaust or ancient civilizations; however, for the study she selected a work of fiction, *Tales of a Reluctant Psychic: The Freak, Visions, and Far* (Matas, 2009) from her teacher's classroom library. She told me that she chose her book by reading the first few pages, which caught her attention. However, when asked to describe her best experience in an ELA classroom, Jenica talked about a teacher-assigned novel study. Although it seemed as though she enjoyed choosing her own book, she also expressed a general satisfaction with the books that her teachers have selected for her in the past. When asked about her advice for someone who hates to read, Jenica responded with the following: "if someone likes sports books and stuff, like if they don't like to read, but they like sports, find a book about a sports person." Evidently, Jenica was able to identify the benefits of self-selected reading for reluctant readers.

Veronica also demonstrated an understanding of the importance of choosing a book that reflects her interests. Veronica spoke enthusiastically about the book, *Innercity Girl Like Me* (Bernardo, 2007), that she chose to read for the study: "maybe people . . . who I'd recommend to read it . . . have started drugs, have started . . . a gang. Maybe it'll get them out of . . . starting to, break it down and maybe . . . stop . . . 'cause you might end up in jail, and

you might end up killing someone.” Veronica expressed a willingness to keep reading a book even if she finds it boring at the beginning: “I like to read books like this because . . . they catch my eye, and sometimes when they start off boring, they get really good, or when they start off good, they . . . stay good through the whole book.”

### *Negative Comments About Self-selected Text*

Andrew made the most negative comments about self-selected texts. In total, I identified nine negative judgments about self-selected reading; of those nine idea units, eight came from statements by Andrew. Rebecca mentioned that students aren’t always motivated to read their self-selected books regularly; however, the remainder of her comments about self-selected reading (11 idea units) was positive.

It was evident from his comments that Andrew finds it difficult to choose his own books: “ ’cause sometimes the blurb isn’t really, like it makes it sound exciting and really good, but sometimes it’s not.” When I asked Andrew about his worst reading experience in an ELA classroom, he described a book that he selected from his teacher’s classroom library: “it was, like, two German names or something, and it was about them moving back and forth. It wasn’t really good. I didn’t know what was going on.” Andrew went on to admit that he was only able to complete half the book.

### *Content and Connections*

As it was set in Winnipeg, Veronica made strong connections with her book, and was able to give examples of several personal connections that she made with the text: “well it sort of reminds me of where we live, even though . . . we don’t have gangs or whatever, but

lots of people are smoking and it talks about . . . Jig-town in here.” In total, I identified 19 idea units from Veronica’s comments that I categorized as being connections. She was also able to re-tell the plot in detail, with a total of 39 idea units in relation to content: “it’s about a girl, Maria, who . . . moves in with her grandma because she doesn’t really like her parents, and her dad beats her, and she meets new people, and she joins a gang.”

Jenica, on the other hand, said that she was unable to make any connections with her book; however, I reworded the question: “so could you kind of maybe relate to the character? Did you see yourself in her?” Jenica was then able to talk about connections she made with the main character: “yeah, a little bit. She . . . was close-minded, and . . . she only thought of things that were rational.” When Jenica was asked why the book hooked her interest, she described the content: “she was avoiding . . . other explanations besides scientific ones, and the fact that she was . . . a realist. She . . . thought that there was . . . a rational, mathematical explanation for everything.” In total, I identified 12 idea units from her comments about the content of the book, which is significantly lower than the number of idea units that came from Veronica’s statements.

#### *Sources of Students’ Preferred Texts*

In Table 4, I compiled the data in relation to the category of *text origin* as well as relevant sub-categories (*peers*, *school*, *teacher-assigned* and *public library*). The students were asked to identify their preferred sources of reading material. Whenever students made references to accessing *self-selected* books in the classroom or school library, or through teacher recommendations, I categorized this under *school*. Any reference that students made to assigned text as a preferred source was categorized under *teacher-assigned*. The majority

of study participants reported that they obtained their reading material from the school, either through teacher recommendations, the classroom library, or the school library. None of the students indicated teacher-assigned texts as the origin of preferred texts. The number of expressed idea units associated with each sub-category can be seen in Table 4:

Table 4  
*Origins of Students' Preferred Texts*

Text Selection	Idea Units
Peers	10
School	28
Teacher-assigned	0
Public library	3
Purchases	6

However, two of the students (Andrew and Veronica) mentioned that they trusted their teachers to recommend books to them. Andrew expressed a respect for his teachers, such as his grade 5 teacher who recommended *April Raintree* (Culleton, 1995) to him. He said that he prefers teacher-assigned reading or teacher recommendations because “you don’t have to search for a book, and the teachers . . . probably know what books you like.” Veronica also told me that her ELA teacher recommended the book she chose to read for this study.

Andrew stated at several points throughout the interview that he finds it difficult to choose a book that he likes, so he often relies on the school librarian and his teacher to guide him in selecting a book based on his interests; however, he claimed to have read most of the

books in his classroom library. Jenica's preferred type of reading material is nonfiction, and she reported a large selection of nonfiction in the teacher's classroom library, but not in the school library.

In contrast to this, Rebecca and Jenica reported that they listen to peer recommendations over those of their teacher because, according to Rebecca, "me and my friends have a lot in common. So they'd probably like the books I'd like to read."

The family members of the study participants all seemed supportive of their reading. Lena stated that her mother often takes her to Chapters or Wal-Mart to purchase her reading materials, enabling her to re-read her favourite texts more conveniently. Veronica and Rebecca also mentioned that their mothers take them to buy books. Jenica told me that she goes to the public library with her dad, and Andrew mentioned going with his sister.

#### *Students' Preferred Ways of Responding to Reading*

The category of *reading response methods* and associated sub-categories (*group discussion, comprehension questions, writing, artistic interpretation* and *presentations*) are found in Table 5. The study participants were asked to name their preferred method of responding to reading. The sub-category of writing would envelop reading logs or journals, and more formal written response such as essays. The study participants in this study reported group discussion, writing, and artistic activities as being their favourite ways to respond to reading. The number of idea units associated with each sub-category can be seen in Table 5:

Table 5  
*Students' Preferred Ways of Responding to Reading*

Reading Response Methods	Idea Units
Group discussion	17
Comprehension questions	5
Writing	22
Artistic interpretation	18
Presentations	5

Although Rebecca is a strong student, and her teacher reported that she obtains high marks on her assignments, she stated that during and after-reading activities sometimes diminish her reading enjoyment: “you kind of just stay into the book instead of just going and asking a bunch of questions. I just like reading straight.” She also told me that different types of assigned reading activities don’t usually make her more or less interested in a book.

Andrew stated that reading *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2001) in grade 7 was one of his favourite reading experiences because students were allowed to read in small groups. When asked why he preferred to read in groups, he responded, “it makes me more focused on the book.” Veronica and Lena also articulated that they prefer to discuss the book that they have been assigned. Veronica said that it is possible to develop new understandings of a text “you never caught . . . until you go and . . . talk about the book.” Conversely, Jenica expressed a dislike for working in groups. She stated that she prefers to work on her own and “read quietly,” and described literature circles as “tedious” because students had to “work together

and . . . read the books out loud to each other.” She informed me that she’s not comfortable working with her classmates.

*Summary of this Results Chapter in Relation to the Research Questions*

Through an analysis of the data, answers to the three research questions were revealed. Student responses were divided into four sections: a) what the students said about teacher-assigned reading; b) what the students said about self-selected reading; c) what the students said were their preferred texts; and d) what the students said were their preferred ways of responding to reading. This was appropriate considering the commonalities among the participants’ responses to the interview questions, and the overall themes of teacher-assigned and self-selected reading. A discussion of these findings can be found in Chapter 5.

The five study participants expressed their understandings of a teacher’s motivations to both assign texts, and allow students to select their own texts. Furthermore, all study participants were able to recognize at least one way in which they would benefit from different types of text selection. Of particular interest in this study was the finding that the interest in the reading material’s content, whether it be from a teacher-assigned or self-selected text, was identified as the most important factor in reading motivation. Most students described their book’s content when asked why it was a positive reading experience.

The number of positive judgments for teacher-assigned and self-selected reading was similar in number; however, there was a large disparity in the number of negative judgments made. I categorized far fewer negative idea units about self-selected reading. However, these students spoke enthusiastically about some of the texts that their teachers have assigned them

in the past, but only if they found the texts interesting. At several points, teacher-assigned books were described as “boring” by the study participants.

The final themes discussed in this chapter were the availability of books to students and the methods by which they select these books. The majority of the study participants stated that they obtain their preferred texts from the school, and many rely on their teacher for recommendations. Although the study participants seemed to trust their teacher to suggest books to them, reading *assigned* text is seen differently, and was not mentioned as a preferred method of text selection. However, several study participants also said that they discuss books with their friends, and heed their advice when it comes to which books are worth reading.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the varied experiences of middle years students with teacher-assigned and self-selected text in the ELA classroom. This chapter begins with a discussion of the significance of the results in relation to pedagogical practice. A discussion of how the findings support and extend existing research literature follows. The emphasis in this chapter is on the ways these findings may contribute to current understandings of text selection and reading motivation. Suggestions for future research and limitations of the study are also presented.

#### *Significance of the Study Findings in Relation to Pedagogical Practice*

It is clear that the five study participants in this study see reading as a personalized act that is dependent upon the preferences of the reader. The results suggest that these students prefer to choose their own reading materials to having texts assigned to them, as they made more negative comments about teacher-assigned texts than self-selected texts. The study participants discussed the importance of reading texts that they find engaging and interesting. Two of the study participants (Lena and Veronica) complained about the novel, *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001) that they had just been assigned in their ELA class. However, both of these students claimed to enjoy reading when they were permitted to select their own books. Although it is almost impossible for a book used in a whole class novel study to meet the needs, reading level, and interest of 30 different students (Bryan, 2010; Ivey, 1999), the two study participants also claimed to have positive reading experiences with *The*

*Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2001), a novel study they completed in grade 7. For these students, the text itself may be more important to reading engagement than the method of text selection. Hopefully, Tracey, the study participants' current teacher, will gauge all of her students' reactions to *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001) and consider a replacement for next year if that reaction is negative. From personal experience, I know that if students don't like the book, it is unlikely that they are going to read it.

The method of text selection used in a classroom does not necessarily have to be teacher-assigned *or* self-selected. Instead, teachers might present a range of texts from which students can choose. For example, a teacher could organize a literature circle unit based on a particular theme such as problems at school (Bryan, 2010). Although students are given a choice of five or six different titles, all of the books will meet the learning goal designated by the teacher. This way, the teacher retains some control over what students are reading and learning, but at the same time, students still get to enjoy the benefits of choice. The teacher and students thus negotiate the selection of texts together.

Adolescent literature has become a booming industry over the past few years (Reno, 2008). In Manitoba, MYRCA, an annual list of books deemed appropriate for students in grades five through eight, is a literacy initiative meant to help not only students, but also their teachers select books that are both level appropriate and interesting. Books such as *The Heaven Shop* (Ellis, 2004), *Heck Superhero* (Leavitt, 2004), and *The Crazy Man* (Porter, 2005) focus on themes ranging from current global concerns to social issues. The fact remains, however, that the books on MYRCA's list are originally screened and reviewed by adults: teachers, teacher-librarians, library staff, booksellers and university professors. Herein lies the counterintuition: teachers want to give their students choice, but they want them to

make the “right” choice. No matter how much high-quality young adolescent literature is provided for students in school or classroom libraries, teachers must accept that when they allow students to select their reading material, they surrender some control over what they are reading.

However, in this study, not all of the study participants’ comments about teacher-assigned text were negative. In fact, the number of positive comments about teacher-assigned and self-selected reading was similar. Although all of the students reported positive past experiences with whole class novel studies, most of them also spoke of negative experiences. This is most likely due to the fact that with some or most, but not all whole class novel studies, the teacher is in control, telling students when and how much to read at a given time. As adult readers, we talk about books with our friends; we don’t write plot summaries or create character sketches (Atwell, 2007). Furthermore, we seldom force ourselves to finish a book we hate. Based on the study participants’ comments, it appears that these students’ attitudes toward teacher-assigned text seems largely dependent on the quality of the book chosen by the teacher, and the reading-related activities that the teacher assigns. It is obvious, then, that for these students, content is of overall importance to the enjoyment of a book, more so even than level of difficulty or length. Nonetheless, the study participants seemed to gain more understanding from their own selections, since there was more talk around content in relation to self-selected books. It is important to note that when a student dislikes a self-selected book either due to minimal understanding of content or limited connections, s/he can simply put the book down and choose something else to read. With a teacher-assigned book, however, the problem is quite different. The student must force herself/himself to finish the text regardless of a lack of interest or enjoyment.

Because the findings indicate that school is the main origin of preferred texts, schools (and teachers) need to continue to invest money into ensuring their libraries contain a large collection and a wide variety of quality books. However, even though the school is the main source of the study participants' preferred reading materials, it is important to stress that these are books that the students choose, either on their own or through the recommendations of a teacher or librarian; they were not assigned. In fact, none of the study participants identified teacher-assigned text as being the origin of their preferred texts.

Although budget and time constraints can be restrictive for teachers, creating a classroom library full of books that students will want to read may be one of the best ways to motivate all student readers (Gambrell et al., 1996). Like Tracey, who asks her students what kind of books they want her to buy for the classroom library every fall, Atwell (2007) recommends that teachers spend time browsing in bookstores and reading book reviews in order to find appropriate literature for their students. One such source of recommendations that is useful for teachers is *CM: Canadian Review of Materials* ([www.umanitoba.ca/cm](http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm)). Atwell asks her students to recommend books to her and to their classmates during book talks. She knows her students well, and understands the type of material that they are interested in reading. She pushes students to read more advanced texts within the genres for which they have expressed an interest. Atwell feels that when students are given choice, "they will read more books than we ever dreamed possible and more challenging books than we ever dreamed of assigning to them" (p. 13).

The fact remains that students are far more likely to select their reading material from the classroom library (Gambrell, 1996); therefore, teachers need to make sure that their libraries meet the needs of all students. It is important for teachers to be aware of their

students' interests so that they can stock their libraries with reading material that is reflective of these interests. This can be done through student surveys or simply by conversing with the students in one's classroom. At the school in which the study was conducted, junior high teachers work in two-teacher teams, so they teach only two different classrooms. In most other junior high schools in Winnipeg, teachers are responsible for teaching at least four classrooms, which amounts to approximately 120 students. It is beneficial for teachers to work with a smaller number of students in order to develop relationships with them, and to learn about these students as readers.

Nevertheless, teachers are faced with a tough decision. Do they allow students to read and respond to books that are, in their opinions, of poor quality, or do they force-feed them books that could potentially turn them off reading altogether? I feel that teachers should establish some guidelines around text selection. I've sometimes heard colleagues say, "I don't care what students read as long as they're reading." Many teachers overlook the quality of their students' reading material because they are so focused on getting students to read. Atwell (2007) believes that anyone can become a reader, but that some students, especially the boys in her classroom, need a little more help choosing books they will love. Like Andrew, many students are overwhelmed when asked to choose a book (Reutzel & Gali, 1998). Teachers do not always show students how to choose books that may interest them. Of the five study participants, Andrew made the most negative comments about self-selected reading; the majority of his comments were related to difficulties in choosing a text. It is possible that he has not been given the tools to choose books that he will enjoy.

When teachers send their students to the library, the latter often pick the book with the least amount of pages, series novels, books based on movies and television, comic books

or magazines (Mellon, 1990; Worthy, 1996b). Students might turn to this type of reading material because they do not know how to choose a book that will interest them. Then again, these types of texts may be what really interest certain students. Furthermore, they may benefit from exposure to these texts by becoming more confident and proficient as readers:

No particular type of reading is being urged here as the panacea. There is no formula: not contemporary literature as against literature of the past, nor minor as against major works, nor even syntactically simpler as against more demanding works.

Rather, we need to be flexible, we need to understand where our pupils are in relation to books, and we need a sufficient command of books to see their potentialities in the developmental process. Our main responsibility is to help the student to find the right book for growth. (Rosenblatt, 1956, p. 71)

The traditional novel is not the only type of reading material that should be readily accessible in schools.

Lena was able to identify her 'home run' text (Kim & Krashen, 2000; Ujiie & Krashen, 2002; Von Sprecken et al., 2000) as the book, *Twilight* (Meyer, 2006). Although she mentioned that before discovering the book, she avoided reading "at all costs," she now sees herself as a reader and has even branched out to other authors who write books of the same genre. Once a child falls in love with a book and has a positive reading experience, it is more likely that s/he will continue to read for pleasure. Teachers can assist students in making better choices; to choose literature that will hold their interest and help them not only to grow as readers, but as young adults.

In terms of reading response, there was a strong preference against the traditional reading response methods that teachers assign to students during and after reading. These

types of activities, such as book reports and comprehension questions, may cause students to resent books (Worthy et al., 2001). Adolescent readers have the potential to respond to literature in complex and multi-faceted ways; however, it depends on the setting and the materials that their teachers provide (Ivey, 1999). All five of the study participants claimed to enjoy writing about their books. It is possible, however, that writing was reported as the most popular activity because this is what students are most used to doing. As reading motivation declines in the middle years (Anderson et al., 1985; Cline & Kretke, 1980; Ley et al., 1994; McKenna et al., 1995), it is of utmost importance that middle years teachers spend the time to develop activities that students will enjoy doing in order to keep them motivated.

In this study, the numbers regarding the study participants' awareness of teachers' motivations for both types of books are quite low. This suggests that teachers may need to spend more time explicitly explaining their reasoning behind different reading assignments, or even why they want students to be reading at all. If students understand how their classroom work will benefit them in the future, they may see the value in their reading assignments instead of viewing them as disconnected time-fillers that they complete only to please the teacher. Rebecca stated that after-reading activities don't do much to increase her interest in a text, and expressed the desire to read without having to worry about completing an assignment. Teachers may even choose to show students the outcomes from the ELA curriculum and demonstrate how these outcomes are linked to the work done in the classroom.

Although some high-achieving students complete the work that their teachers assign seemingly without complaint, they may secretly dislike the reading material as much as their more defiant classmates. Both Rebecca and Jenica were vocal about their dislike of specific

books and activities that have been assigned to them. Rebecca said the following when asked about the types of novel studies she has done in the past: “we’d like draw a picture of the setting and stuff, or just like answer where the setting is and . . . what are those other things? I don’t know . . .” Jenica articulated her aversion to literature circles and other types of group work in the classroom. According to their teacher, these two study participants have always obtained high marks on their assignments. However, even though students like Rebecca and Jenica will put effort into their assigned work either to please the teacher or to achieve a good mark, it is possible that they do not see the point of completing these assignments.

Despite the work of Moje (2000, 2002, 2009), adolescents’ voices are often absent from studies although research has shown their insights to be of value (Alvermann, 1998). The study participants gave much insight into the dynamic of self-selected and teacher-assigned text in the middle years ELA classroom; however, the findings in this study cannot be generalized to all students. Future research is required to discover if other student populations will generate similar findings.

### *Theoretical and Research Implications*

The findings of this study support an interpretation that: a) the students preferred to choose their own books, b) the students viewed teacher-assigned reading positively depending on the quality of the text, c) the students gained more understanding from self-selected texts, d) the students did not have a strong awareness of teacher motivation or benefits to themselves when reading assigned or self-selected texts, e) the main origin of preferred texts was the school, and f) the students preferred non-traditional ways of responding to texts.

*Importance of Text Selection*

The findings of this study confirm what is already known about self-selected reading and student motivation. Past research has shown us that teachers can spark students' interest through the type of teaching they do, and the materials they expose them to (Schiefele, 1999). In general, the students interviewed for this study tended to have positive attitudes about reading. Although they spoke of negative experiences primarily with teacher-assigned text, these negative experiences seemed to be counterbalanced by novel studies that the study participants enjoyed. Their current classroom library, observed by me and described by the students, has a large selection and variety of texts. All of the study participants mentioned that their teacher regularly gives them choice in their reading material. Rebecca spoke of their teacher permitting them to read magazines sometimes during silent reading, but other days she said it's "strictly . . . novels." Tracey confirmed that she encourages the students to read novels when she wants them to complete a written response around their reading.

The study participants were vocal about the importance of finding a genre that appeals to them, and using that as a springboard to find similar books; however, they were also open to reading texts of other genres if they "liked" the book. The study participants all expressed an understanding that with teacher-assigned text, they would be exposed to reading material that they would otherwise not choose for themselves. However, three of the five participants also described the feeling of being unable to focus on a book they do not find interesting, as well as feeling unmotivated to finish the book. The literature is unequivocal in terms of choice in reading materials resulting in the improvement of reading attitudes (Farrell, 1982; Heller, 1940; Hunt, 1996-97; LaBrant, 1936; Langford & Allen, 1983; Manning & Manning, 1984; Sadoski, 1984; Worthy, 1996b; Worthy et al., 1998).

### *Student Reactions to Teacher-assigned Text*

Although previous research suggests that students associate their most negative reading experiences with assigned texts (Ivey & Broaddus, 1999), this was not always the case with the students in this study. Most of the study participants associated a negative experience with teacher-assigned reading; however, all of the study participants described at least one positive past experience with teacher-assigned text, many of them doing so without direct prompting from the researcher. Although Gambrell et al. (1996) found that only 10% of students talked about teacher-assigned reading when asked to describe books that they enjoyed, in this study, the number of positive judgments made about self-selected and teacher-assigned reading was almost equal. The study participants talked about being happy with teacher-assigned text as long as it is a “good” book with interesting content, such as *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2001), and provided that the after-reading activities are engaging. Furthermore, it is interesting that three of the five students who participated in this study were able to recognize that teachers may choose to assign certain texts in order to support learning in the content areas. This idea is commonly seen in current research (Moje, 2008; Moje & Sutherland, 2003).

The research literature has also shown that proficient readers often dislike teacher-assigned reading (Ivey, 1999). This was the case with two of the five study participants, Rebecca and Jenica. Although both students are academically motivated, and earn top marks in their ELA class, they were the most vocal of the five study participants in their criticism of reading assignments and activities they have been assigned in the past. If the top students in the class dislike the books their teachers choose, it is unlikely that struggling and reluctant readers will even attempt to read these texts. Many students will trick the teacher into

thinking they have read the book by completing the after-reading assignments (Worthy, 1998). In my personal experience, I have seen many students complete book reports by talking with their classmates who have already read the book, or by looking for plot summaries on the Internet.

### *Reading Comprehension*

Students are capable of reading and understanding more difficult texts when they are interested in the content (Fink, 1995-96, 2006; Hunt, 1996-97; Schiefele, 1999). In this study, all five of the study participants were able to re-tell the story lines of the novels they read; however, there was more content talk around self-selected texts than teacher-assigned texts. The higher number of negative comments the study participants made about teacher-assigned books may be a direct result of a lack of interest in these texts' content. In fact, these students mentioned content as the most important factor in the enjoyment of their novels. This supports the finding that the best way for teachers to encourage reluctant and struggling readers is to provide them with texts that are personally interesting to them (Worthy et al., 1997). Lena and Andrew, in particular, revealed a dislike for reading until they were permitted to select a text with content that "hooked" their interest.

Veronica was especially enthusiastic in her descriptions of the novel she chose to read for the study. Of the five study participants, she also made the most comments that I classified as being connections. I identified more idea units about connections in relation to teacher-assigned books. This is interesting considering the significant difference in positive comments students made about self-selected text versus teacher-assigned text. This could be due to the fact that students see "making connections" as a strategy that their teachers "force"

them to use. Like Rebecca, who described the different elements of a story's plot as "those things," students may associate certain strategies primarily with teacher-assigned text. Students may not always recognize a) the value of accessing this strategy when they are reading on their own, and b) that they are most likely unconsciously making connections to their favourite books. During her interview, Jenica stated that she could not think of any connections to her self-selected novel, but made connections later on in the interview without realizing it.

### *Reading Motivation*

The research literature has shown that choice is an extremely important factor in motivating students to read (Spaulding, 1992). However, the findings of this study revealed that choice in reading materials is important to the study participants, but it may not be as important as the literature suggests. Although the study participants appreciated being given opportunities to choose their own texts, many of them stated that they preferred a balance in text selection. The study participants seemed especially open to teacher recommendations when it came to selecting their reading material. This is a way for teachers to encourage students to experience other authors and genres, while at the same time continuing to give them choice and control of the texts they are reading.

Self-selected text is not necessarily a quick fix to improving reading motivation. As we have seen, one of the study participants, Andrew, actually made far more positive comments about teacher-assigned text than self-selected text. Although the study participants appreciated being given opportunities to choose their own reading material, all of the students made positive comments about teacher-assigned text. Bintz (1993) found that

students will often dismiss teacher-assigned texts and activities because they have no say in how they are selected. There may be power issues at play in the classroom that have nothing to do with reading. The study participants in this study, however, expressed the sentiment that the teacher has more experience and would select a book that suits their interests. The study participants were unable to give detailed responses as to their teacher's motivations for assigning certain texts, and the possible benefits to them; this confirms Thomson's (1987) view that teachers should spend more time discussing their reasoning behind reading assignments. However, it was interesting that students were able to identify more reasons that a teacher would assign a text rather than allow students to choose their own (17 and 13 idea units respectively).

#### *Sources of Students' Texts*

Past research has shown that when students reach the middle years, they are more likely to listen to the book recommendations of their peers over those of adults (Shore, 1968; Wendelin & Zinck, 1983; Worthy, 1996a). When teachers are passionate about certain books, however, students may more readily listen to teacher suggestions (Csikszentmihalyi & McCormack, 1986; Roetteger, 1980; Worthy & Turner, 1997). The experiences of the five study participants support these findings to a certain extent, with peers and school being the two most preferred sources of students' self-selected reading material. Although several of the study participants mentioned that they would listen to their friends over their teacher when it comes to books, three of these five students also expressed a confidence that their teacher knows what interests them and would recommend books accordingly.

Other studies have found that students' preferred texts are often missing from school and classroom libraries because teachers and librarians view them as inappropriate (Bryan, 2009; Jones, 2005; Worthy & McKool, 1996; Worthy et al., 1999). The findings of this study do not support the previous research. The classroom library was the preferred source of the study participants' reading materials. Although one of the study participants told me that the school library did not contain a wide enough selection of non-fiction reading materials, she mentioned that her teacher had made a point of stocking the classroom library with this type of text. This particular study participant did not overlook the fact that her teacher asks students about their interests and reading preferences before purchasing the books for her classroom. Luckily, the school is generous in supplying the teachers with funding for books (\$800 per year, per teacher).

### *Reading Response*

The research strongly advocates the inclusion of collaborative learning when it comes to reading activities (Gambrell, 2004; Manning & Manning, 1984; Sadoski, 1984; Palmer et al., 1994; Worthy, 1996a). Although the study participants named group discussion among their preferred ways of responding to reading, written and artistic response were the most popular. One of the study participants was strongly opposed to any type of group work. However, three of the study participants told me that group discussion helped them to better understand the book. The study participants' preferred responses were either private or individual in nature, as in writing or drawing; or personal, as in discussions with friends or peers, but not with the teacher. All of these methods of reading response allow for some expression of individuality and personal opinion, as opposed to more traditional or

“academic” responses. Not surprisingly, the majority of the students in this study reported that they did not like comprehension questions or class presentations, but it is interesting that they preferred writing, which is also a traditional way of responding to literature.

Although the study participants said that they liked “trying to put the book’s words into . . . a picture, and trying to get it right, and just following what the book says, and you draw it and starts to look like . . . your imagination” (Lena), this is essentially just a plot summary. Artistic response may be more “fun,” but students should still be exposed to a variety of reading response methods (Karolides, 2000). All five study participants were clear that a balance or a “mix” in both text selection and assignments is key in creating a positive classroom-learning environment.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

The findings of this study suggest several directions for future research. As this study was aimed at establishing an understanding of the experiences of adolescent readers with assigned and self-selected text, further research is warranted to confirm or contrast the findings of this study with other populations of students, based on differences in terms of socio-economic status, geographical setting, age/grade level, or ability. The study participants in this study were capable and talented students; the results may differ dramatically with students who do not like reading. Future research may build on the findings of this study and explore specific areas, such as a study focused exclusively on the impact of text selection on reluctant or struggling readers. Doing so may generate more specific implications for classroom teachers. Further research into students’ awareness of teacher motivations would also contribute to a greater understanding of reluctant or resistant

readers. Perhaps students would not resist the work their ELA teachers ask them to do if they understood why they were doing it. It would also be worthwhile to focus on one specific area in terms of the way text selection impacts the reader, such as the impact of teacher-assigned text on a reader's self-concept.

There are many possibilities for future research studies to be drawn from the study participants' responses. It would be interesting to explore why the students responded the way they did; for example, why is writing a popular response? Is written response acceptable to students only because they have come to expect this from teacher-assigned reading activities? Why do students prefer private and/or personal response? Gaining a greater understanding of the reasons behind students' preferences for methods of reading response would be invaluable to classroom teachers.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

The findings and consequent discussion presented in this study must be considered in terms of the following limitations. The first is in light of the recruitment methods. Had I waited a longer period of time to accept returned consent forms, there may have been a larger pool from which to select study participants. Opening recruitment to a wider range of student ages could have been used to obtain a deeper understanding of the effect of reading selection on students at different stages of their academic development. A related limitation of the study to these inclusion parameters is that the findings may not be transferable to the reading experiences of other adolescents. This study is based on the interviews with five grade 8 students who volunteered for the study and thus does not speak to the experience of all students when reading self-selected or teacher-assigned text.

A bias may have also occurred in that those who chose to participate did so because they have generally had a positive school experience as opposed to those who did not volunteer. At some point during their interviews, the five study participants all claimed to like reading. It is possible that this stems from the family support the study participants stated they regularly receive around their reading. As such, the data yielded may be applicable only to the students who chose to participate. Similarly, the study participants who volunteered for this study were primarily Caucasian and female from middle class families. Only one male student volunteered, which may support the idea that boys are often the more reluctant readers in junior high classrooms (International Reading Association, 2006). The experiences shared by young female adolescents may not apply to those of young male adolescents.

Beyond gender differences, however, there are also cultural differences that may affect students' school reading experiences (Barton et al., 2000; Bruner, 1996; Street, 1993, 1994). Consequently, there may also be limitations on the extent to which the findings of this study are relevant to adolescent students of different ethnicities as three out of five study participants in this study were Caucasian. The study participants were not representative of the student make-up of other schools in Winnipeg or any major Canadian city.

Another area of limitations of this study is connected to data collection. The interview guide was developed as a way to uncover adolescents' experiences with teacher-assigned and self-selected texts. While this study provides an important understanding of the adolescent perspective, the interview guide may have limited the opportunity to explore, in greater depth, the experiences of adolescents in the ELA classroom. Furthermore, it was sometimes difficult to obtain detailed answers from the study participants. Although some of the questions in the interview transcript may be seen as leading, they were done so to encourage

these students to share as much information about their reading experiences as possible.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Analysis of the findings of this study suggests that it is important for teachers to allow students to select their own texts; however, it is more important for teachers to create a safe environment for students where they can take risks, and where their choices and opinions are respected and valued. A teacher must get to know his or her students and learn about their interests. By doing so, teachers will be able to recommend specific books for specific students that they genuinely feel those students will enjoy.

When teachers develop a relationship with their students, there is a trust; a trust that teachers have the students' best interests at heart, and a trust that students will put forth an effort in class. However, it is also helpful when the students are comfortable enough with their teachers to share when they do not like, or cannot understand a text that has been assigned to them, or even one that they have selected themselves.

Through reading, teachers hope that students might develop a better understanding of themselves and their surroundings: "Because we write, read, think, talk, listen, represent, and know ourselves and others through language, literature is a significant means by which we disclose and construct our understandings of the world" (Leggo, 2001, p. 14). The fact remains that there is a place for teacher-assigned reading in the middle years classroom. It is important to expose students to a wide range of reading material that they would otherwise not select for themselves. Evidently, there is also value in student-selected text; therefore, establishing equilibrium between different types of text may be the best balance.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Ethics Approval



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## APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

August 21, 2009

**TO:** **Jessica Threadkell** (Advisor - Gregory Bryan)  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** **Lorna Guse, Chair**  
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

**Re:** **Protocol #E2009:077**  
**"Seeking New Perspectives on Self-Selected and Teacher-Assigned  
Texts: Exploring the Adolescent Reader Experience"**

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement. This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

## Please note:

- if you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to Eveline Saurette in the Office of Research Services, (e-mail [eveline\\_saurette@umanitoba.ca](mailto:eveline_saurette@umanitoba.ca), or fax 261-0325), including the Sponsor name, before your account can be opened.
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: [http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/ors\\_ethics\\_human\\_REB\\_forms\\_guidelines.html](http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/ors_ethics_human_REB_forms_guidelines.html)) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.

## Appendix B: Researcher Introduction and Recruitment Script

My name is Ms. Threadkell and I am the principal researcher in this study. I am very happy that your teacher has said it's ok for me to come and talk to you today. I am doing a research study in order to complete a degree at the University of Manitoba. I am interested in learning about what students think about reading, in particular reading materials that are assigned to them and reading materials that they can choose for themselves. I am a teacher at a different school, and I teach students that are your age. I hope this study will help me become a better teacher, but I also hope that other teachers will read the results of this study and will maybe change some things they do during silent reading.

For the study, I will assign you one of three books: *The Heaven Shop*, *Heck Superhero*, or *The Crazy Man*. You will not be able to choose which book you read. For the next part, however, you will be allowed to choose any type of reading material you like, as long as it is appropriate for school, of course! You may be asked to read either the teacher-assigned book or the self-selected book first.

After you have finished reading each book, I will ask you some questions about what you've just read. The interviews will last for about half an hour, and will consist of 10 questions. Each interview will be audio taped, and I will then write out what we both say word for word. All of the audiotape recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure location in my house, so no one else will be able to hear or see what you've said. When I write up my study, I will change your name, as well as the name of your school and anyone else that you mention during your interview. This way, it will not be easy for others to identify you. I may also ask you to write down some of your reflections about what you are reading. This is only to add to my understanding of you as a reader. Don't worry; my findings in this study will not affect your mark in ELA!

This study will last for about 6 weeks. You will be given about 2 weeks for each reading period, but it's ok if you can't finish either the book that is assigned to you, or the reading material you have chosen to read.

In order for you to participate, your parents must give their permission. You and a parent will both have to sign forms indicating that it is ok for you to participate in the study. I will be randomly selecting between 3 and 5 students to participate in the study, so there is a chance that you might not be selected if there are more than 5 volunteers.

You do not have to participate in this study if you choose not to. Even if you do agree to participate, you can change your mind later. If you change your mind, just tell me, or your parents that you don't want to do it anymore, and your participation will stop right away. Participating in this study will not affect your mark in ELA. Your teacher will not know what you've said during the interviews.

## Appendix C: Letter to Parents

**Date:** September 1, 2009.

**Title:** Seeking New Perspectives on Self-Selected and Teacher-Assigned Texts: Exploring the Adolescent Experience

**Local Principal Investigator:** Jessica Threadkell

**Contact Information:** Tel: (204) 788-XXXX      Email:

**Supervisor:** Gregory Bryan, Faculty of Education

**Contact Information:** Tel: (204) 474-XXXX      Email:

I invite your child to take part in a research study being conducted by Jessica Threadkell, a graduate student at The University of Manitoba as part of her Master of Education. The study is described below. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with the principal investigator, Jessica Threadkell, or her supervisor, Professor Gregory Bryan (contact information is listed above). For your records and information, you will be provided with a copy of this consent form.

This study explores the difference in reading motivation in middle years students when reading teacher-assigned texts and self-selected texts. The focus of the study is to learn if students' views of reading change with the way in which texts for use in the classroom are selected. The study will be guided by two research questions:

- 1.) What do adolescent readers have to say about reading self-selected texts in the classroom?
- 2.) What do adolescent readers have to say about reading teacher-assigned texts in the classroom?

Your child's participation will consist of reading two novels (one teacher-assigned and the other self-selected). Data collection will be in the form of two 30-minute interviews (in one or two sessions). The researcher may also use your child's written responses to literature to aid in the analysis of interview data. The interviews, written responses and the majority of reading time will be completed during English language arts (ELA) class. However, the data collected during this study will in no way affect the student's formal assessment in ELA this year. Participating in this study might not benefit your child directly, but we might learn things that will benefit other children, as well as identify the need for teacher professional development.

While full anonymity in this study is not possible, all measures will be taken to ensure that your child will not be identifiable to others as a participant in this study. Interview locations will be selected for the comfort and confidentiality they provide.

Measures will also be taken to protect the confidentiality of responses. The interviews will be audiotape recorded and transcribed. Answers will be kept private and names will not be used in any transcripts or reports, including use of direct quotations from interviews in reports related to the findings of this study. If you agree to allow direct quotations from your child's interview to be used in future reports, please check the appropriate box on the consent form.

The audiotapes and transcripts of interviews will be kept in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet at the personal residence of the principal researcher. All materials will be kept securely stored for a period of 5 years after publication, at which time they will be destroyed. If you choose, you may examine the tapes, transcripts, and analysis of your child's interview at any time by contacting the researcher or her supervisor.

Although your child's name and names of other people or specific places will be replaced with code names, it is possible his/her identity may be apparent to others because of the unique knowledge s/he provides. If a research assistant is required to help transcribe interviews from audiotape recording, s/he will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement, agreeing not to discuss any aspects of your child's participation in this study.

**As your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary, s/he may end his/her participation at any time without any consequence.** In the event that your child wishes to end his/her participation in the study, either you or your child may contact me at the e-mail address or phone number listed above to inform me of this. Whether or not your child participates will have no implications for his/her success in ELA this year. Neither your child's classmates, teachers, nor the school's principal will be made aware of who is, or is not participating in this study.

If you have any questions throughout the duration of the interviews or your child's participation in the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or her supervisor.

In the event that you have any difficulties with the researcher or her supervisor, or wish to voice concern about any aspect of your child's participation in this study, you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or [Margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca).

Finally, results of this study will be available approximately four months after your child's participation. If you would like to receive a copy of the results of this study, please check the appropriate box on the consent form.

Your support in this process is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jessica Threadkell

## Appendix D: Consent Form

**Title:** Seeking New Perspectives on Self-Selected and Teacher-Assigned Texts: Exploring the Adolescent Experience

**Local Principal Investigator:** Jessica Threadkell

**Contact Information:** Tel: (204) 788-XXXX      Email:

**Supervisor:** Gregory Bryan, Faculty of Education

**Contact Information:** Tel: (204) 474-XXXX      Email:

By signing this form, I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) indicate that I have read and understood this form and that I give my informed consent for my child to participate in this study. In no way does this waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I understand that my child's participation consists of two interviews that will take place in a location that provides comfort and confidentiality. I understand that the interviews will be audio taped recorded and transcribed but that answers will be kept private and names will not be used in any transcripts or reports. If you check the box below, you consent to the use of direct quotations from your child's interview in reports relating to this study.

While there are minimal risks involved, I know that my child's participation in this study is completely voluntary and that s/he may end participation at any time. In the event that my child wishes to end his/her participation in the study, I understand that I may contact the principal researcher at the e-mail address or phone number listed above.

I also understand that I may ask any questions or express any concerns at any point during my child's participation in this study to: the researcher, her supervisor, or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122 or [Margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca).

- I have read and understood this form.
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary.
- I consent to the use of direct quotations from my child's interviews to be used in reports relating to this study, but that his/her name will not be used.
- I consent for my child to be audiotape recorded.
- I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date:    /   /     
           D  M  Y

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator, Jessica Threadkell

Date:    /   /     
           D  M  Y

## Appendix E: Student Assent

Dear Student,

This letter is to ask if you will be in a research study I am doing for my university studies. I am interested in learning about what you think about teacher-assigned books and self-selected reading materials. If your parents agree and if you choose to participate, I will meet with you and ask you questions about the things you read in school. I will assign you one of three books: *The Heaven Shop*, *Heck Superhero*, or *The Crazy Man*. For this portion of the study, you will not be able to choose which book you read. For the next part, however, you will be allowed to choose any type of reading material you like, as long as it is appropriate for school, of course! You may be asked to read either the teacher-assigned book or the self-selected book first.

After you have finished reading each book, I will ask you some questions about what you've just read. The interviews will last for about half an hour, and will consist of 10 questions. Each interview will be audio taped, and I will then write out what we both say word for word. All of the audiotape recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure location in my house, so no one else will be able to hear or see what you've said. When I write up my study, I will change your name, as well as the name of your school and anyone else that you mention during your interview. This way, it will not be easy for others to identify you.

I may also ask you to write down some of your reflections on what you are reading. This is only to add to my understanding of you as a reader. Don't worry; my findings in this study will not affect your mark in ELA!

You do not have to participate in this study if you choose not to. Even if you do agree to participate, you can change your mind later. If you change your mind, just tell me, or your parents that you don't want to do it anymore, and your participation will stop right away.

If you want to be part of this study, please write your name on this form.

---

Your Name

## Appendix F: Letter to School Principal and School Superintendent

**Date:** September 1, 2009.

**Title:** Seeking New Perspectives on Self-Selected and Teacher-Assigned Texts: Exploring the Adolescent Experience

**Local Principal Investigator:** Jessica Threadkell

**Contact Information:** Tel: (204) 788-XXXX      Email:

**Supervisor:** Gregory Bryan, Faculty of Education

**Contact Information:** Tel: (204) 474-XXXX      Email:

Dear XXX,

Please accept this letter as a written request for permission to conduct a research study within the Winnipeg 1 School Division in partial fulfillment of the Master of Education program at the University of Manitoba. This study is designed to examine the relationship between the way text is selected and reading motivation. The study will be guided by two research questions:

- 1.) What do adolescent readers have to say about reading self-selected texts in the classroom?
- 2.) What do adolescent readers have to say about reading teacher-assigned texts in the classroom?

Data collection will be in the form of two 30-minute interviews (in one or two sessions). The researcher may also use students' written response to literature to aid in the analysis of interview data. The interviews, written responses and the majority of reading time will be completed during English language arts (ELA) class; however, the data collected during this study will in no way affect the student's formal assessment in English language arts this year.

Information derived from the study will be useful in considering the factors associated with high levels of student motivation in the English language arts classroom.

For the study, I will be asking students from XXX school to participate. Permission will also be obtained from the parents of the students involved in the study. Please find an enclosed copy of my research proposal for your records.

While full anonymity in this study is not possible, all measures will be taken to ensure that students will not be identifiable to others as a participant in this study. Interview locations will be selected for the comfort and confidentiality they provide.

Measures will also be taken to protect the confidentiality of responses. The interviews will be audiotape recorded and transcribed. Answers will be kept private and names will not be used in any transcripts or reports, including use of direct quotations from interviews in reports related to the findings of this study.

The audiotapes and transcripts of interviews will be kept in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet at the personal residence of the principal researcher. All materials will be kept securely stored for a period of five years after publication, at which time they will be destroyed.

Although students' names and names of other people or specific places will be replaced with code names, it is possible that a student's identity may be apparent to others because of the unique knowledge s/he provides.

If a research assistant is required to help transcribe interviews from audiotape recording, s/he will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement, agreeing not to discuss any aspects of students' participation in this study.

The Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board has approved this study. In the event that you have any difficulties with the researcher or her supervisor, or wish to voice concern about any aspect of the study, you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or [Margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca).

If you wish to receive the results of this study after it is completed, please provide your name and address below.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Jessica Threadkell

---

Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the results of this study.

Name

---

Address (either mail or e-mail)

---

## Appendix G: Student Interview (Adapted from Ivey &amp; Broaddus, 2001)

**Interview Instructions**

Before beginning the interview, the researcher will first establish rapport with the participant through casual conversation (how are you today? etc). Next, the student assent form will be verbally reviewed and any questions the participant may have will be answered. Following this, the researcher will explain and demonstrate the audio recording device and ensure that the participant is comfortable.

- 1).
  - a.) What do you see as the reason/purpose that the teacher assigns certain texts for you to read?
  - b.) What do you think are the benefits to you of the teacher selecting texts for you to read?
  - c.) What do you see as the teacher's reason/purpose for allowing you to choose your own texts?
  - d.) What do you think are the benefits to you of the teacher allowing you to select your own texts to read?
- 2). Where do you usually get the material you like to read?
- 3). When you were reading, what connections could you make? (to other texts, movies, real-life experiences, etc.)
- 4). Did this book "hook" your interest? What was it about the book that did or did not "hook" you?
- 5). Was this a positive reading experience for you? Please explain why it was good/bad.
- 6). Tell me about the worst reading experience you've had in an ELA class. Tell me about the best experience.
- 7). What advice would you give to a student who hates to read in school?
- 8). Would you recommend this text to someone? Why/Why not?
- 9). What kind of activities do you like to do when you have finished reading?
- 10). Is this the type of material you usually like to read? Why/ Why not?

## Appendix H: Table 1

*Categories Used to Code the Transcripts of the Recorded Semi-structured Interviews*

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Awareness of teacher motivation	Teacher-assigned	Mention of an understanding of a teacher's purpose for assigning texts.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you see as the reason or purpose that a teacher would assign certain texts for you to read or certain books for you to read?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: <i>So that we can expand our interests in different books.</i></p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: So how do you think a teacher giving you a book; how would that expand your interest?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: Because we don't always . . . Sometimes they give us books we don't necessarily think we would like.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Awareness of teacher motivation	Self-selected	Mention of an understanding of a teacher's purpose for allowing students to select their own texts.	<u>Lena</u> : If they assign us a book that maybe we don't like, or just isn't our thing, then we won't read it. <i>If we get to pick our own book, then we'll read it more and get more into it than a book the teacher assigns.</i>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Positive judgment	Teacher-assigned	Positive statement in relation to texts that have been assigned by the teacher.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: Can you tell about the best experience, or one of the best experiences you've had in an ELA class?</p> <p><u>Veronica</u>: <i>Um, I think it'd be last year when we were reading <i>The Breadwinner</i> [an assigned text], 'cause I really liked that book, and I don't know, it reminds me of how people in Afghanistan don't have a lot, and they have to, like, cover up and, like, women can't go outside without a husband and stuff.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Positive judgment	Self-selected	Positive statement in relation to texts that have been selected by the student.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: Do you like it when the teacher gives you a book to read, or do you like picking your own?</p> <p><u>Rebecca</u>: I like picking my own.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: Why is that?</p> <p><u>Rebecca</u>: <i>Um, just more options and stuff. You get to read what they're about and pick which one you'd like to read best.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Negative judgment	Teacher-assigned	Negative statement in relation to texts that have been assigned by the teacher.	<p><u>Lena</u>: I don't know, like, the book that we're reading in novel study really hasn't gotten me yet.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you think it is about that book that it hasn't been able to hook you yet?</p> <p><u>Lena</u>: Um, we're only on, like the second chapter, and we haven't gotten far into the book, but <i>it's not really getting exciting. He's just, like, living on this island in nowhere, hating himself; hating people around him. It's not really interesting.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Negative judgment	Self-selected	Negative statement in relation to texts that have been selected by the student.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: Do you find it hard sometimes to choose a book?</p> <p><u>Andrew</u>: Yeah.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: Yeah? Just . . . Why do you find it hard?</p> <p><u>Andrew</u>: <i>'Cause sometimes the blurb isn't really, like it makes it sound exciting and really good, but sometimes it's not.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Perceived benefits	Teacher-assigned	Mention of an understanding of any benefits to the student when reading texts that have been assigned by the teacher.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: So what do you think are the benefits to you of the teacher selecting a book for you to read?</p> <p><u>Rebecca</u>: <i>You get to, like, read more stuff that you probably wouldn't read on your own because you wouldn't, like, pick that book. And then you might enjoy it, and start liking different kinds of books.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Perceived benefits	Self-selected	Mention of an understanding of any benefits to the student when reading texts that s/he has selected.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you think are the benefits to you of the teacher allowing you to select your own book?</p> <p><u>Andrew</u>: <i>You enjoy your book and you read</i>, and if your teacher assigns you a book you don't like, then you won't want to read, and then you just lose interest in reading.</p>
Book content	Teacher-assigned	Discussion of content from texts that have been assigned by the teacher.	<p><u>Andrew</u>: <i>She had a really good life, and then suddenly she had to move away</i>, like people were dying in her family and . . . She owned a coffin shop called The Heaven Shop.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Book content	Self-selected	Discussion of content from texts that have been selected by the student.	<p>Jessica: Ok, can you tell me a little bit about the book?</p> <p>Veronica: <i>Um, it's about a girl, Maria, who her, um, she moves in with her grandma because she doesn't really like her parents,</i> and her dad beats her, and she meets new people, and she joins a gang.</p>
Connections	Teacher-assigned	Discussion of ways the student connected to texts that have been assigned by the teacher.	<p>Jessica: Could you personally connect to anything in the book?</p> <p>Lena: Mmm, um, not really myself personally, maybe like, I don't know, <i>his best friend in here sticks up for him a lot and takes care of him. That's something that I connected to.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Connections	Self-selected	Discussion of the ways the student connected to texts that s/he selected.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: So when you were reading this book, what connections could you make and that could be to, like other books you've read, movies, TV shows, real-life experiences . . .</p> <p><u>Veronica</u>: <i>Well, it sort of reminds me of where we live, even though, like, we don't have gangs or whatever,</i> but lots of people are smoking, and it talks about, like, Jig-town in here.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Text origin		Mention of the sources of the student's self-selected texts.	<p data-bbox="1040 306 1430 485"><u>Rebecca</u>: If, like, a friend says, "this book was good," I'll go and read it.</p> <p data-bbox="1040 527 1430 852"><u>Jessica</u>: Would you find that you would maybe listen to your friends' advice about a book more so than your teacher?</p> <p data-bbox="1040 894 1430 1436"><u>Rebecca</u>: Um, yeah. <i>I would probably read a book my friend suggested other than my teacher because, I don't know . . . Me and my friends have a lot in common. So they'd probably like the books I'd like to read.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Reading response methods		Mention of the student's preferred method of reading response.	<p><u>Lena</u>: Sometimes we have, like last year, we were reading a certain book and we had to draw the characters, as what the book was telling us, and the details the book was telling us, we'd put into, like, the drawings.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: Ok. Do you remember what book that was with?</p> <p><u>Lena</u>: <i>The Breadwinner</i>.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you think it was about that, do you think, that you enjoyed?</p> <p><u>Lena</u>: <i>Um, trying to put the book's words into, like, a picture, and trying to get it right, and just following what the book says, and you draw it and it starts to look like your imagination.</i></p>

Category	Sub-Category	Description	Example
Other		Utterances that I was not able to categorize in the categories listed above.	<p><u>Jessica</u>: When you came to Canada in 2005, were you already able to speak and understand English?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: Yeah.</p> <p>Jessica: You took English classes in the Philippines?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: <i>I went to a private school, so yeah.</i></p>

## Appendix I: Table 2

*Explanation of the Examples Used for the Different Coding Categories*

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Awareness of teacher motivation	Teacher-assigned	<p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you see as the reason or purpose that a teacher would assign certain texts for you to read or certain books for you to read?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: <i>So that we can expand our interests in different books.</i></p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: So how do you think a teacher giving you a book; how would that expand your interest?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: Because we don't always . . . Sometimes they give us books we don't necessarily think we would like.</p>	<p>Jenica clearly identified a reason why a teacher would assign texts to students.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Awareness of teacher motivations	Self-selected	<p><u>Lena</u>: If they assign us a book that maybe we don't like, or just isn't our thing, then we won't read it. <i>If we get to pick our own book, then we'll read it more and get more into it than a book the teacher assigns.</i></p>	<p>Lena clearly identified the teacher's reasoning for allowing students to choose their own texts.</p>
Positive judgment	Teacher-assigned	<p><u>Jessica</u>: Can you tell about the best experience, or one of the best experiences you've had in an ELA class?</p> <p><u>Veronica</u>: <i>Um, I think it'd be last year when we were reading <i>The Breadwinner</i>, 'cause I really liked that book, and I don't know, it reminds me of how people in Afghanistan don't have a lot, and they have to, like, cover up and, like, women can't go outside without a husband and stuff.</i></p>	<p>When asked to describe a positive reading experience, Veronica made a specific reference to a teacher-assigned novel, <i>The Breadwinner</i>, from the previous academic year.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Positive judgment	Self-selected	<p><u>Jessica</u>: So you personally, what do you prefer? Do you like it when the teacher gives you a book to read, or do you like picking your own?</p> <p><u>Rebecca</u>: I like picking my own.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: Why is that?</p> <p><u>Rebecca</u>: <i>Um, just more options and stuff. You get to read what they're about and pick which one you'd like to read best.</i></p>	<p>When asked about her preference for selecting texts, Rebecca indicated that she prefers being giving the opportunity to choose what she reads, and gave reasons for her answer.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Negative judgment	Teacher-assigned	<p><u>Lena</u>: I don't know, like, the book that we're reading in novel study really hasn't gotten me yet.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you think it is about that book that it hasn't been able to hook you yet?</p> <p><u>Lena</u>: Um, we're only on, like the second chapter, and we haven't gotten far into the book, but <i>it's not really getting exciting. He's just, like, living on this island in nowhere, hating himself; hating people around him. It's not really interesting.</i></p>	<p>Lena referred to a specific teacher-assigned novel, <i>Touching Spirit Bear</i> (Mikaelsen, 2001), and indicated that she was not enjoying the book.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Negative judgment	Self-selected	<p><u>Jessica</u>: Do you find it hard sometimes to choose a book?</p> <p><u>Andrew</u>: Yeah.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: Yeah? Just . . . Why do you find it hard?</p> <p><u>Andrew</u>: <i>'Cause sometimes the blurb isn't really, like it makes it sound exciting and really good, but sometimes it's not.</i></p>	<p>Andrew made a negative comment about self-selected reading, indicating that he often finds it difficult to choose his own book.</p>
Perceived benefits	Teacher-assigned	<p><u>Jessica</u>: So what do you think are the benefits to you of the teacher selecting a book for you to read?</p> <p><u>Rebecca</u>: <i>You get to, like, read more stuff that you probably wouldn't read on your own because you wouldn't, like, pick that book. And then you might enjoy it, and start liking different kinds of books.</i></p>	<p>Rebecca clearly identified a specific way in which a teacher-assigned text would benefit her.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Perceived benefits	Self-selected	<p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you think are the benefits to you of the teacher allowing you to select your own book?</p> <p><u>Andrew</u>: <i>You enjoy your book and you read</i>, and if your teacher assigns you a book you don't like, then you won't want to read, and then you just lose interest in reading.</p>	<p>Andrew clearly identified a specific way in which a self-selected text would benefit him.</p>
Book content	Teacher-assigned	<p><u>Andrew</u>: <i>She had a really good life, and then suddenly she had to move away</i>, like people were dying in her family and . . . She owned a coffin shop called The Heaven Shop.</p>	<p>Andrew shared details of the content of the book that was assigned to him.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Book content	Self-selected	<p>Jessica: Ok, can you tell me a little bit about the book?</p> <p>Veronica: <i>Um, it's about a girl, Maria, who her, um, she moves in with her grandma because she doesn't really like her parents, and her dad beats her, and she meets new people, and she joins a gang.</i></p>	<p>In response to my request, Veronica shared details of the book that she selected.</p>
Connections	Teacher-assigned	<p>Jessica: Could you personally connect to anything in the book?</p> <p>Lena: Mmm, um, not really myself personally, maybe like, I don't know, <i>his best friend in here sticks up for him a lot and takes care of him. That's something that I connected to.</i></p>	<p>Lena made a specific connection between herself and a character from the book she was assigned.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Connections	Self-selected	<p><u>Jessica</u>: So when you were reading this book, what connections could you make and that could be to, like other books you've read, movies, TV shows, real-life experiences . . .</p> <p><u>Veronica</u>: <i>Well, it sort of reminds me of where we live, even though, like, we don't have gangs or whatever</i>, but lots of people are smoking, and it talks about, like, Jig-town in here.</p>	<p>Veronica made a specific connection between her surroundings and the setting of the book she selected.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Text origin		<p><u>Rebecca</u>: If, like, a friend says, “this book was good,” I’ll go and read it.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: Would you find that you would maybe listen to your friends’ advice about a book more so than your teacher?</p> <p><u>Rebecca</u>: <i>Um, yeah. I would probably read a book my friend suggested other than my teacher because, I don’t know . . . Me and my friends have a lot in common. So they’d probably like the books I’d like to read.</i></p>	<p>Rebecca identified a specific source of many of the texts she reads;</p> <p>she follows the recommendations of friends.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Reading response methods		<p><u>Lena</u>: Sometimes we have, like last year, we were reading a certain book and we had to draw the characters, as what the book was telling us, and the details the book was telling us, we'd put into, like, the drawings.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: Ok. Do you remember what book that was with?</p> <p><u>Lena</u>: <i>The Breadwinner</i>.</p> <p><u>Jessica</u>: What do you think it was about that, do you think, that you enjoyed?</p> <p><u>Lena</u>: <i>Um, trying to put the book's words into, like, a picture, and trying to get it right, and just following what the book says, and you draw it and it starts to look like your imagination.</i></p>	<p>Lena identified artistic expression as a preferred method of responding to literature.</p>

Category	Sub-Category	Example	Explanation
Other		<p><u>Jessica</u>: When you came to Canada in 2005, were you already able to speak and understand English?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: Yeah.</p> <p>Jessica: You took English classes in the Philippines?</p> <p><u>Jenica</u>: <i>I went to a private school, so yeah.</i></p>	<p>I asked Jenica a question about her background. Her response informs my understanding of her as a person and, perhaps, as a reader, but this comment does not fit within the categories that I employed to organize the data.</p>