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EXCAVATING READERS: FINDING MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS'
LITERACIES IN A PERMEABLE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

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SEAN KOTTKE

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EXCAVAT

EXCAVATING READERS: FINDING MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS' LITERACIES IN A
PERMEABLE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

By

Sean Kottke

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Program in Educational Psychology and Educational Technology

2007

EXCAVAT

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ABSTRACT

EXCAVATING READERS: FINDING MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS' LITERACIES IN A
PERMEABLE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

By

Sean Kottke

Adolescent literacy researchers frequently recommend that teachers incorporate lots of

opportunities for students to self-select personally interesting texts to read as part of the

language arts curriculum, and the literature suggests that this may be especially powerful

for improving boys' motivation for and attitude toward reading for multiple purposes.

However, the literature does not contain a detailed analysis of the texts that adolescent

readers might choose in such a permeable curriculum, the extent to which boys' and

girls' reading selections might overlap or differ, or the extent to which choices made for

academic purposes resemble those that students might make for recreational (or

vernacular) purposes. During the 2004-2005 school year, texts selected by 48 sixth

graders for a variety of academic contexts in which students were encouraged to choose

personally interesting reading materials were documented and analyzed, as were the text

selections made by a subgroup of focal students for vernacular purposes. Fantasy and

realistic fiction were the most popular genres among participants' text selections, with

boys' selections more evenly spread across a wider range of genres than were represented

among girls' selections. Sports-themed texts from multiple genres and media as well as

supernatural mystery/thrillers had an especially greater prominence among the text

selections made by boys. Boys selected texts from a wider range of media than did girls,

particularly for vernacular purposes. This trend was observed at both the group and

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individual levels. While serial works were extremely popular among both boys and girls, boys' text selections for vernacular purposes were more heavily concentrated around serial works than were girls' and their text selections for academic purposes were more skewed toward non-serial works than were girls'. Girls' serial reading interests were almost exclusively print-based, and were visible in the text selections they made for academic purposes. Boys, on the other hand, were more likely to be interested in multimedia series, that is, series that had unique manifestations in print, visual and interactive media. While the majority of both boys' and girls' text selections across contexts were works created specifically for a young adult audience, boys were more likely to select more linguistically difficult texts to read for vernacular purposes than for academic texts, while the opposite trend was observed to a lesser degree among girls' selections. While the distribution of genres within the text selections made by girls for vernacular purposes was echoed in the distribution of genres within their academic text selections, the distribution of genres within boys' academic text selections was more reflective of boys' vernacular print-literacy practices than the overall portrait of their vernacular literacy practices. Boys expressed a number of strong genre preferences, and the database of text selections reveals that these boys engaged frequently with these genres not only in their vernacular literacy lives, but also within the more permeable contexts of their Language Arts curriculum. However, as permeable as the teacher made his classroom to the texts of students' vernacular literacy practices, a focus on print literacy practices over the course of the school year limited the extent to which the full range of boys' vernacular literacy practices could become visible within academic literacy contexts.

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To August and Alexis, whose text selections and pop culture commitments constantly fascinate, and who always wondered why 100 pages wasn't enough.

And to Nick, who has no idea what letting me hang out at the library every day in middle school has wrought ...

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks first go out to my Dissertation Committee, Drs. Nell Duke, Matthew Koehler, E. David Wong and Chairperson Mark Conley. Their support, guidance and recommendations at all stages of this dissertation have been invaluable. This same team of eminent scholars also aided me at every stage of my doctoral career, from advising and early coursework through preliminary exams, practicum research and comps. Nothing in the pages that follow could have been accomplished without their expertise. Special thanks to Matt for getting the ball rolling on this doctoral career with his initial phone call in January 2002 to let me know that I'd received the University Distinguished Fellowship. That call was the best birthday present of my life. The faculty, administration and, especially, students, of Harwell Middle School deserve deepest thanks for allowing me to spend a year with them observing and asking questions. As of this writing, the students who participated in this study are embarking on their next great journey, starting their freshman year at Homestead High School. While Ed Connors, the teacher whose classroom served as the site of this study, is no longer teaching language arts at Harwell, he has embarked on his next great journey into the waters of principalship. To my colleagues and students at Miller College, thank you for patiently listening to my ideas, sharing your stories and occasionally kicking me in the rear to get this writing done. To all of the Humanities Block students who passed through my room at Tomball High School, thank you for letting me learn as much from you as I hope you learned from me. Finally, I owe an enormous debt to my parents, who have supported me in every way possible at every stage in my education and who let me hole up in their guest room for many marathon writing sessions. Thank you for your generosity and patience.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"R.AT.06.01: Students will be enthusiastic about reading and do substantial reading and

writing on their own." (Michigan Department of Education, 2006, p. 60)

"Reading books can be a lot of fun when they're not the same ones that they make you

read over and over and over till you want to shoot yourself." (Portman, 2006, p. 60)

I first became aware of Ed Connors'[1] approach to reading instruction during the

2003-2004 school year, when my daughter was enrolled in his sixth grade homeroom at

Harwell Middle School. At the time, I was immersed in the literatures on reading

motivation and adolescent boys' literacy practices, and had become convinced that

maximizing opportunities for students to self-select texts for language arts instruction

might abate the well-documented free-fall of children's attitudes toward reading for both

academic and recreational purposes over the middle school years. Indeed, my own

experiences teaching ninth grade English had given me first-hand evidence of the power

of self-selection to build reading motivation among teenagers (particularly boys) who had

at some point in middle school lost much of whatever enthusiasm they had previously

had for reading.

For seven years, I taught language arts in the gifted/talented program in a

suburban comprehensive high school. The final four years of my teaching career were

within an interdisciplinary Humanities Block, which I designed in conjunction with a

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[1] All names of people, schools and municipalities are pseudonyms.

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social studies teacher. Ninth graders would enroll in designated honors sections of freshman English and World Geography, while tenth graders would enroll in designated honors sections of sophomore English and World History. My teaching partner and I would typically share 30-50 ninth graders and 20-40 tenth graders, each group separated into two sections that would meet concurrently. Instructional units in the paired language arts and social studies classes were thematically coordinated, and the majority of activities in both classes involved cooperative grouping on short- and long-term projects that incorporated content and skills from both disciplines.

Two required elements of the Humanities Block transcended disciplinary boundaries and served to distinguish the Humanities experience from other honors or pre-AP options available at the school. One element was the I-Search Project, in which students selected a topic of personal interest and designed a yearlong program of investigation into that topic. Students generated research questions during the first few weeks of school, then spent the majority of the first semester reviewing the literature on their chosen topic. This research culminated in the writing of an I-Search paper at the end of the first semester. During the second semester, students engaged in further research as well as designed materials for a three-hour, culminating exhibition at the end of the school year. The exhibition was designed like a science fair, with students displaying their work in the high school commons while peers, other teachers, administrators and community members were invited to circulate among the displays and query the students about their projects.

The second distinguishing feature of the Humanities Block experience was a program of self-selected reading, in which students chose their own reading materials for

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self-defined purposes each grading period and made brief presentations of their own design for each item that they read. Over the course of four years, we experimented with different ways to encourage students to read broadly and for multiple purposes. One year, we required that each grading period's reading selections be from a different genre (for example, non-fiction/biography one grading period, a novel the next, a poetry collection for a third). Another year, we assigned point values to different kinds of reading materials (for example, a poem might carry one point, while a novel might carry 10) and then required that students complete a certain number of points' worth of independent reading each grading period. This program was developed in accordance with a mandate from our local administration to increase students' sheer amount of reading, whether or not that reading was tied to specific classroom activities or state objectives. The goal was to increase reading, period.

Over the course of our four years of administering the self-selected reading component of the Humanities Block, we witnessed the most enthusiasm from students when we dropped all general restrictions on the reading that students could choose from each grading period and instead worked with students to fashion individual reading diets. After studying each student's reading history (based upon an autobiographical essay centering on prior literacy experiences and the particular experiences each student had while completing summer reading assignments), I had individual reading conferences with every student, during which we jointly developed a reading contract for the semester. Included on the contract were an inventory of possible titles (based upon the students' prior reading interests as well as the topics they chose for their I-Search Project), and an expectation for the number of pages that the student would read over the

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course of the semester. Contracts were revised each grading period as students encountered additional reading materials of interest or discovered new reading interests.

As my role as teacher began to morph from repository of literacy knowledge to facilitator of individual students' literacy development, I began to hear more testimonials from students about their rediscovery of a passion for reading once their academic and recreational literacy practices had an opportunity to converge. Boys especially who had resolutely rejected reading as a hobby came to embrace reading and take great joy in sharing books and other reading materials. They had been turned off, they said, in middle school, during which they perceived reading being recast as an instrumental activity to be applied to high stakes tests and other information management tasks, rather than as an avenue of pleasure. Sharing my stories of excavating readers with other teachers at annual meetings of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), I came to understand the value of choice as a powerful motivator in adolescent literacy development. The convergence of my experiences with the findings of empirical investigations into choice increased my enthusiasm for finding ways in which teachers could incorporate choice into their classrooms, but it also increased my frustration as I found many teachers skeptical about the possibilities.

When my daughter enrolled in Mr. Connors' homeroom and explained the unique arrangement that he had made for incorporating students' self-selected texts as the primary vehicle of literacy instruction into his classroom, I became intrigued by the possibilities this classroom offered to investigate boys' reading choices and habits. At a parent-teacher conference early in the school year, Connors outlined for me the rationale behind his pedagogy. Connors noted that his teaching practice was heavily influenced by

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Robb's *Teaching Reading in Middle School* (2000), and he felt that the cornerstone to

achievement of Michigan's Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCE) for reading was

the first objective listed in the domain of Reading Attitude for every grade level, K-8 (and

the only one for grades 3-8): "Students will be enthusiastic about reading and do

substantial reading and writing on their own" (Michigan Department of Education

[MDE], 2006, p. 60). If students are unmotivated to read widely and enthusiastically, he

reasoned, they will neither choose to read on their own for recreational purposes nor

stand much of a chance of mastering the other GLCEs in other domains such as

Comprehension, Fluency, Word Study and Metacognition. Although the Michigan

Department of Education lists Reading Attitude last among domains within the English

Language Arts Reading Strand (MDE, 2006), Connors argued that attitude should be seen

as the foundation for success in other domains of reading achievement, not as a

pedagogical lagniappe to be addressed after the work of teaching comprehension is done.

Furthermore, over the course of five years of teaching sixth grade language arts, he

noticed that the boys in his class have typically had poorer attitudes toward reading than

girls. To promote positive reading attitudes among all his students – but especially boys –

Connors built his language arts curriculum around three key elements that his own

reading of the professional literature suggested carry great power in generating and

sustaining positive attitudes and high motivation toward reading: opportunities for self-

selection of personally interesting texts, an emphasis on building students' visualization

skills, and a reading workshop framework for instruction based on the Literature Circles

model.

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over the course of her year in Mr. Connors' class, I decided to spend the next school year

observing Connors and his students to learn more about whether and how his approach to

teaching language arts, which resonated so strongly with my own teaching experiences as

well as my research into adolescents' attitudes toward reading, might encourage more

young adult readers (especially boys) to join the "literacy club." How Connors

incorporated each of the above components into his instruction will be briefly described

here, with more details about both the specific practices enacted in the curriculum and the

research supporting those practices to follow in subsequent chapters.

Self-selection

The amount of freedom given to students to self-select personally interesting

reading materials for their language arts instruction was for me the most striking element

of Connors' language arts curriculum in terms of both its departure from traditional

norms of reading instruction for middle school students and its similarity to what I had

attempted to do in my own classroom. Connors' own background as an unmotivated

reader in middle school informed his decision to structure his language arts curriculum

around students' self-selected texts. He recalled a healthy reading diet of magazines,

newspapers and other kinds of sports-related texts, but this enthusiastic reading was

conducted entirely exclusive of the reading instruction he received in school. He did not

enjoy reading as defined and assigned by his middle school teachers. "I don't really like it

when people give me books to read," he said. "It's too schoolish. I like to read what I like

to read." Connors admits that even as an adult, he is "a voracious reader," but only within

the domain of texts that he self-selects.

One kind of text that Connors avidly collects and reads is professional books for

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teachers, especially books about language arts instruction. In his reading of the educational literature, he has noticed "a trend toward the Reader's Workshop approach over whole-class novel approaches" among the best practices advocated in professional monographs such as *Teaching Reading in Middle School* (Robb, 2000) and *In the Middle* (Atwell, 1998). Connors believes that by incorporating students' self-selected texts into a Reader's Workshop setting, he can learn more about what his students are interested in reading and can expand their reading interests through a process he calls "webbing." As he explains:

> Take a student who likes the *Series of Unfortunate Events* books. This is about children who have to overcome something. Here is another book, totally unrelated to the *Series of Unfortunate Events*, that deals with the same thing. And gradually, your reading interests expand. You can't just stick with horse books or *Series of Unfortunate Events* in upper grades, where the reading gets more complex.

Through "webbing" off of students' self-selected texts, Connors creates a permeable language arts classroom (Dyson, 1993, 2003) in which students' personal reading interests are honored and Connors can promote positive attitudes toward reading a variety of different kinds of texts.

The Homestead Public School District, in which Harwell Middle School is located, organizes the school year on a trimester basis, and Mr. Connors used a different strategy for incorporating students' self-selected texts into the reading curriculum each trimester of the 2004-05 school year. During the first trimester, students were expected to engage in independent reading with self-selected texts, recording titles and number of pages read each night on a calendar, which Connors checked at the end of each week.

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Upon completion of a text, students would complete a brief book report worksheet. While Connors did lead the class in read-alouds and mini-lessons on various reading comprehension strategies (e.g., visualizing, drawing inferences) for which students received participation grades, the overall language arts grade that students received for the first trimester was determined almost entirely by the students' independent reading logs and book reports.

During the second trimester, Connors introduced the Genre Project, in which students' self-selection of texts for independent reading was structured around five genres: realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, biography, and science fiction. For each genre, Connors provided students with a differently formatted book report worksheet, and completed book reports were kept in a folder in the back of the room for students to peruse and discover new titles that they might be interested in reading. Because students complained about a relative paucity of science fiction titles in the school and classroom libraries, Connors changed the assignment mid-way through the trimester to allow students to choose their fifth book from any of the other genres if they were unable to find a science fiction text that interested them.

Finally, the third trimester was devoted to a culminating Book Project, in which students were to select a book from any genre to read and around which to structure a poster presentation to be delivered to the class during the final weeks of the school year. The only restrictions on text selection for this project were that the book have more than 150 pages, and that it be a title that the student had not read previously. Every day throughout all three trimesters, Connors included Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time, usually first thing in the morning, during which students were free to read any text

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Visualization

A reader's mental ability to visualize the actions and world of a text has been identified as a successful reading comprehension strategy (e.g., Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Parsons, 2006; Robb, 2000; Sadoski, 1983; Wilhelm, 1997) as well as an indispensable skill for aesthetic engagement with a text (Kajder, 2006; Parsons, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1978). According to Kajder (2006), "[e]ngaged reading is a visual experience, evoking the creation of an imagined story world often referred to as a 'mental movie'" (p. 44). Connors believed that helping students with their visualization skills is the place to start building positive attitudes toward reading. He reasoned that students who are unable to visualize meaning in a text will not be able to engage with a text beyond the surface level and not enjoy reading print in the way that they enjoy engaging with other media narratives that directly appeal to their visual imaginations such as television and video games. By Connors' logic, an inability to visualize meaning in a text could impair other higher level reading comprehension processes, such as the ability to draw inferences. Thus, a strong emphasis on building students' visualization skills formed the foundation upon which Connors built most other cognitive and affective objectives in his language arts curriculum.

This concern for building visualization skills permeated the reading and writing activities that Connors set up for his students. He presented vocabulary lessons as explorations of "picture words," emphasizing the power of many words to evoke vivid mental images (Robb, 2000). Mini-lessons based on short readings from the *Daybook of Critical Reading and Writing* (Claggett, Reid & Vinz, 1999) consistently focused on

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identifying "picture words" in poetry and prose and representing the visual images that they evoked in a variety of ways. Read-alouds from novels such as *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990) and *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning* (Snicket, 1999) led into small-group activities that involved storyboarding and acting out key scenes from the novels. The culmination of this emphasis on visualization skills was an invitation issued by Connors to his students during the second trimester of the school year to bring in texts that they enjoyed reading and that they felt were especially effective in terms of conjuring vivid imagery in the reader's imagination. On the specified day, students brought in a variety of traditional and non-traditional texts, and Connors then led his classes through a series of writing tasks in which students identified "picture words" in their texts, described the effect that those words had on them as they read, and finally drew pictures of the images that they saw.

Literature Circles

The third component of Connors' language arts pedagogy – a reading workshop framework based on Daniels' (2002) Literature Circles model – was perhaps the least developed element of the curriculum during the year I spent observing Connors and his students, despite Connors' strong faith in the power of positive peer support to motivate reluctant readers. During the 2003-2004 school year (the year in which my daughter was a student in Mr. Connors' class), most mornings' DEAR periods were followed by small group conversations about the materials that students had been reading, which segued into a brief, informal whole class discussion in which both Connors and his students talked about what they were reading and swapped recommendations for future reading. To facilitate peer discussions after DEAR time and during regular language arts lessons,

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students were seated in clusters of two tables the entire year (seating four or five students per cluster), and students were free to choose with whom they wished to be seated. There was, to say the least, a great deal of conversation about reading in Connors' language arts classroom.

However, during the 2004-2005 school year, Connors and his teaching partner faced a group of students that they felt was in general less well-disciplined than the previous year's class. Connors began the year as he had his four previous years, with the students seated in rows facing the chalkboard in order to facilitate matching names and faces, but rather than rearranging the tables into clusters as he had previously, he retained the classroom's original arrangement for the entire year. Only twice during my observations were tables arranged in clusters, and only then for particular activities, with a return to the original arrangement immediately after the activity was completed. Connors did retain small group conversations throughout the year's language arts activities, but in contrast to the previous year, these conversations were mostly limited to pairs of students (rather than to groups of four or five) with little to no "travel" away from the seats in which they began the day. This resulted in a classroom environment that was more teacher-directed than I had anticipated, and I believe has important implications for interpreting the findings of this study, which I will address in Chapter 5.

The Study

Connors indicated in a series of interviews that a key assumption underlying all of the strategies he incorporated into his language arts instruction was that students come to school with rich literacy lives that operate under the radar of the literacy practices valued and assessed by traditional language arts pedagogy. Rather than being wholly averse to

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the practice of reading, a child who appears unmotivated to read and underachieves in the language arts may actually be a voracious reader of a wide variety of texts that do not happen to fall within the narrow limits of "what counts as reading," as defined by classroom norms. Students who in a classroom context appear aliterate (that is, they are able to read well yet deliberately avoid doing so) thus may be adopting a stance against externally defined norms for reading *in the classroom context*, but outside of that context may be leading a literacy life characterized by reading deeply into and across texts from a variety of print and non-print genres, engaging in the very sorts of literacy practices that educators believe good readers should engage in, although with a different array of texts than many educators like to assign.

This is precisely the attitude toward reading for academic versus self-defined (or vernacular) purposes that Connors claimed to have adopted as a middle school reader. This is also the attitude that many of the boys in my own language arts classrooms took toward reading, defining themselves as non-readers while sifting through backpacks stuffed with well-read magazines, newspapers, Internet printouts, technical manuals and comic books for the barely-read Turtleback© edition of whatever classic novel we were studying that day (Cavazos-Kottke, 2005). Such contextual aliteracy is also the attitude found among the participants in studies by Smith and Wilhelm (2002, 2006), Newkirk (2002), Fink (2006) and Kajder (2006), who perfectly summarizes the attitude of the alternately voracious and aliterate reader with this quote from her student Gus:

> Here's what it is … I don't read books. I do all we do in class, and pick up a lot. I talk to the gang in here that does read, and pick up some more. I go online. But, be real. When I want to read, this isn't it … I read the paper in the morning. I read

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articles and guides on PS3. I read what I get when friends text me. I read a ton of

blogs, but I aggregate them or else it would take scads of time ... I go there for

the cheats ... I used to read liners of CD's, but now I just read online because I

download MP3's from iTunes. I had to read my car manual last night because one

of the lights got busted. But, I know *that stuff doesn't count*. (p. 5, emphasis

added)

Kajder continues with her thoughts on Gus' comments:

As a reader, he read authentically and purposefully. He was reading selectively

and critically, evaluating online gaming sites and blogs. His reading involved

multiple genres and modalities. He was savvy enough to know how to navigate

in-class tasks, but he needed to be drawn into higher-order tasks that addressed

texts as tools for learning. And clearly, his perception of his own competency as a

reader was impacting his work in the classroom. Gus was a reader. Just not in the

English classroom ... (p. 5)

Mr. Connors' assumption about the vernacular literacy lives of his students, particularly

his boys, thus carries the warrant not only of personal experience but also of published

research into adolescent literacies.

Connors was convinced that the best way to facilitate his students' literacy

development was to break down as many barriers as possible between the vernacular

literacies his students carried with them and the academic literacy practices enacted in the

classroom. The above three strategies – self-selection of personally interesting reading

materials, an emphasis on visualization skills, and a reader's workshop framework – were

implemented with this goal in mind. The present study was designed to interrogate

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Connors' assumptions about his students' literacies and the practices he based on those assumptions, to discover the extent to which those barriers were broken down for a particular group of sixth graders over the course of one year in his language arts class. What are the vernacular literacies engaged in by Connors' students outside of the classroom? Do they differ markedly from the academic literacy practices the students enact in this classroom? When invited to bring the texts of their vernacular literacy practices into the classroom context, do students choose to do so? Are there differences between boys and girls in this regard? Does any of this have a noticeable impact on the students' attitudes toward reading? Ultimately, how successfully do students in Mr. Connors' permeable classroom achieve R.AT.06.01, "Students will be enthusiastic about reading and do substantial reading and writing on their own," (MDE, 2006) the one Michigan Grade Level Content Expectation that Connors sees as the bedrock upon which mastery of all other objectives rests? These were the questions that launched this study.

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CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

In *The Brothers Karamazov* (Dostoevsky, 1880/1952), the preteen boy Kolya

Krassotkin claims that studying Greek and Latin in schools "is simply a police measure

...: [They] were introduced because they are a bore and because they stupefy the intellect"

(p. 292). One hundred twenty five years later, some researchers have drawn similar

conclusions in their attempts to explain boys' disengagement with school and low

motivation for reading. Newkirk (2002) argues that the educational establishment has

valued silent reading more as a means of social control than as a means of nurturing a

love of reading, the tacit goal being to tame impulsive behavior in children (which is in

turn associated more with boys than with girls). Clark (1998) comes to a similar

conclusion regarding foreign language instruction. O'Brien, Stewart and Moje (1995)

label the dominant instructional paradigm of secondary schools a "pedagogy of control,"

(p. 451) in which a one-way flow of information from teacher to student has been reified

as the most efficient model for the delivery of information to students. A major

consequence (unintended or not) is the branding of a narrow range of knowledge as

legitimate, implicitly and often explicitly devaluing much of students' extracurricular

funds of knowledge as illegitimate (Alvermann, 1998; O'Brien, Stewart & Moje, 1995).

Perhaps the most strident recent indictment of schools as institutions of social control

comes in a historical essay by Gatto (2003): "it is in the interest of complex management,

economic or political, to dumb people down, to demoralize them, to divide them from

one another and to discard them if they don't conform. ... [Schools are] drill centers for

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the habits and attitudes that corporate society demands. Mandatory education serves

children only incidentally; its real purpose is to turn them into servants" (pp. 37-38).

Studies of adolescent boys' reading habits and achievement have highlighted a

number of problematic trends. Cognitively, boys consistently underperform relative to

girls on a number of standardized measures of reading and writing ability (Brozo &

Schmelzer, 1997; Gurian, 2001; Newkirk, 2002; Organisation for Economic Co-

Operation and Development & UNESCO Institute for Statistics [OECD-UIS], 2003;

Sommers, 2000; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Young & Brozo, 2001). Affectively, many

boys tend to have such a strong aversion to literacy that they will resist identifying

themselves as "readers," actively avoiding opportunities to read despite having adequate

skills (Bintz, 1993; Moss, 1999; OECD-UIS, 2003; Smith & Wilhelm 2002; Young &

Brozo, 2001). This tendency among boys to reject the descriptor of "reader" is

particularly odd, given that most boys profiled *in the same studies* do indeed read (many

quite voraciously), although not from sources typically sanctioned by schools as

"appropriate" reading material (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm,

2002).

Why did these boys resist identifying themselves as readers, and are there

classroom contexts in which they may have been more likely to count their personal

reading habits as constitutive of an identity as a reader? This case study was designed to

describe the different literacies in which middle school boys engage within the context of

a language arts classroom built around students' self-selected reading materials. To what

extent would middle school boys in such a literacy curriculum draw distinctions between

academic and personal literacy practices and to what extent might their attitudes toward

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reading change over the course of a year's experience with such a reading curriculum? Given the linkages between reading attitude, reading frequency and reading achievement (Bean, 1998), answering those questions should yield a better understanding of the personal literacies that middle school boys engage in outside of the radar of a traditional literacy curriculum, which might in turn help teachers better scaffold meaningful literacy instruction for boys.

Theoretical Perspective

My conceptual framework for understanding literacy is rooted in the idea that literacy is a social practice in which people engage for multiple purposes. As articulated by Barton and Hamilton (2000), the fundamental unit of analysis from such a perspective is the literacy practice, a "general cultural way of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives, [involving] values, attitudes, feelings, ... social relationships ... awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy [as well as] the social processes which connect people with one another [including] shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (pp. 7-8). In short, "literacy is best understood as a set of social practices [which] are observable in events which are mediated by written texts" (p. 9).

Different literacies are associated with different contexts. For example, the literacy practices encouraged and rewarded by certain literacy classrooms may appear radically different from those in which middle schoolers eagerly engage outside of school. While both may involve social interactions around a common text, the discourses governing those interactions as well as the texts themselves may differ considerably. Thus, it is more useful to conceive of an individual's literacy in the plural, that is, an

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individual practices multiple literacies over the course of his or her life, with particular social or institutional contexts enforcing different boundaries for "what counts" as literacy.

A literacy as social practice perspective distinguishes between dominant and vernacular literacy practices within an individual's repertoire of literacies. Dominant literacies are "part of whole discourse formations, institutionalised configurations of power and knowledge which are embodied in social relationships" (Barton & Hamilton, p. 12). In other words, dominant literacies are those literacies that are publicly practiced and rewarded within major institutional contexts, such as school and government. For example, close reading and textual analysis of literary texts is a literacy practice that reflects the dominant literacy enforced and rewarded by traditional secondary language arts programs (O'Brien, Stewart & Moje, 1995). Vernacular literacies, on the other hand, are the "underground" literacy practices in which people engage, typically outside of the radar of institutional authority. Sharing a comic book with a peer and debating the relative strengths of a superhero and his or her archenemy is an example of a literacy practice in which many young people engage, but which typically occurs in non-classroom contexts. This is not to say that vernacular literacy practices are necessarily subversive of or antithetical to the goals of traditional academic literacy practices. These practices are simply the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992) that children utilize outside of the classroom and that are not typically embraced by the language arts curriculum enacted in many classrooms.

A key element of this perspective on literacy is the purpose that an individual has for engaging in a given literacy practice, and a major factor in many boys' opting to

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disengage from active literacy practice in academic contexts is the positioning of a student and classroom at cross-purposes. Newkirk (2002), Clark (1998), Bean (1998), Csikszentmihalyi (1990b) and Ivey (1999), among others, see a fundamental mismatch between school's purposes for teaching literacy and the purposes to which students would like to put their abilities. Whereas schools stress the instrumental importance of literacy for future individual success (an especially visible phenomenon in classrooms centered on preparing students for high-stakes testing), children tend to value literacy for social purposes. Newkirk (2002), Finders (1997) and Dyson (1993, 2003) emphasize the "social work" of writing, in which students incorporate their peers into their creative fictions as a way to forge social bonds and exchange social capital. Other investigators focus on the social work of reading, by which students network, build relationships and solve personally relevant problems through discussions of shared reading (Bean, 1998; Davies, 1998; Dutro, 2001; Galda, Ash & Cullinan, 2001; Guzzetti, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe, & Hardenbrook, 2002; Millard, 1998; Raphael, McMahon, Goatley, Bentley Boyd, Pardo & Woodman, 1992; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). This mismatch between what schools want students to do with literacy and the immediately relevant purposes that students see literacy as valuable for pursuing was one of Dewey's (1902/1990, 1915/1990, 1938) most persistent complaints about "traditional" modes of education, in which "the center of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself" (1915/1990, p. 34). Contemporary researchers have made common cause with Dewey in identifying this mismatch of purpose as particularly demotivating for students of literacy and in suggesting that an academic context for

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literacy instruction that creates spaces for students' personal interests and vernacular

literacies has potential for supporting positive attitudes toward literacy as well as for

facilitating achievement in academic literacy practices.

Review of the Literature

In this section, I will begin by reviewing a number of theories for boys'

disengagement from academic literacy practices, including developmental theories that

focus on boys' lower self-efficacy as a result of early negative experiences with reading,

and contextual theories that focus on a mismatch of purposes for reading between

teachers and students as well as the gender politics of reading that emerge in adolescence.

I will then review the research on boys' vernacular literacy practices and how they

contrast with the dominant literacy practices of school. Finally, I will review a number of

instructional recommendations based on this understanding of adolescents' literacy

practices. I will focus on two models – Book Club and Literature Circles – that synthesize

these recommendations into an approach to literacy instruction that appears especially

promising for promoting boys' participation in academic literacy practices.

Reading Competency and Motivation

Feelings of competency form an essential component in several domain-general

(Eccles, Wigfield & Schiefele, 1998; Schunk, 1985) and literacy-specific (Clark, 1998;

Guthrie & Wigfield, 2001; Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo & Vacca, 2003) models

of motivation. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) privileges self-efficacy for a given

activity (a competency judgement based upon feedback from myriad sources) as a

primary factor in determining one's future engagement in that activity. Self-determination

theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) conceptualizes motivation as a three-way interaction

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between self-assessments of competence, autonomy and relatedness. According to flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990a), the kind of intense engagement that is most conducive to further development is impossible without an appropriate match between one's skill level and the demands of a particular task.

Similarly, developmental explanations for boys' disengagement with and underachievement in reading typically argue that boys tend to have more negative attitudes toward reading than girls do because many boys' earliest school reading experiences are marked by frustration. At five or six years of age, the average girl has undergone sufficient cognitive development to position her for success in learning how to interact with an abstract symbol system. However, many boys at this age lag behind girls by a year or two, and so the age at which literacy instruction begins is more amenable to the average girl's developmental readiness than the average boy's (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Soderman, 1986). Many boys are thus set up to experience frustration with early reading experiences, which may predispose them to disengage from reading in the future (Ivey, 1999).

However, a biographical study of twelve successful adults with dyslexia suggests that there may be more to literacy motivation than a sense of competency or self-efficacy. Contrary to the researcher's expectations, all participants in the study reported avid reading despite having significant disabilities from a young age (Fink, 1995). Many had read widely enough from an area of passionate interest to call themselves experts well before they achieved reading fluency norms established by their respective schools and well before they had been instructed in strategies for overcoming their disabilities. The same phenomenon appears in autobiographical and anecdotal accounts of boys whose

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motivation to read, sparked by access to personally interesting reading materials, allowed

them to rapidly overcome gaps in reading achievement due to dyslexia (Buchanan, 2001)

as well as to chronic disengagement from literacy instruction (Brozo, 2002).

In these studies, avid reading within domains of personal interest and self-

generated purposes for reading allowed individual vernacular literacies to blossom, and

students' attitudes and abilities in dominant literacy practices showed positive gains. In

other words, the development of students' vernacular literacies facilitated the

development of their skills in dominant literacies. Several themes emerge from a review

of investigations into particular features of recreational and academic contexts that

support (or hinder) boys' positive engagement with multiple literacies.

Purposes For, and Stances Toward, Reading

One important theme, introduced above, is the congruence (or lack thereof)

between students' and teachers' purposes for engaging in literacy practices. On one level,

an incongruity between students' and schools' purposes can shut down active participation

in classroom literacy events. Through the lens of Reader-Response Theory (Rosenblatt,

1978), a mismatch between efferent and aesthetic stances toward reading might also

bring students and schools to cross-purposes. The efferent stance, favored by

standardized tests and the New Critical close reading paradigm, focuses readers' attention

on what information or concrete understanding they can take away from a text. It is at the

heart of the pedagogy of control (O'Brien, Stewart & Moje, 1995). The aesthetic stance,

on the other hand, involves engagement with a text at an experiential level, in which

readers connect their "lived-through experiences" with those of literary protagonists.

Rosenblatt claimed that the aesthetic stance is the most appropriate to take toward

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literature, although one can imagine informational texts (for example, biographies) that can invite aesthetic response beyond their efferent purposes (Alexander, 1997; Cavazos-Kottke, 2006). Fowler (1988) and Barrs (2000) theorized that encouraging students to adopt an aesthetic stance would better motivate them to engage with reading than a "back-to-basics" emphasis. Several studies have demonstrated that greater student engagement – as well as levels of achievement equal to those displayed by students exposed to a traditional, skills-based curricula – occurs in the context of literacy classrooms in which aesthetic stances toward reading have been emphasized (Barrs, 2000; Bean, 1998; Cox & Many, 1992; Raphael, McMahon, Goatley, Bentley, Boyd, Pardo & Woodman, 1992; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Wiseman, Many & Altieri, 1992).

Literacy and Gender Discourse

Most of these studies emphasize that a congruence of purposes for literacy mastery and an aesthetic stance toward engaging with a text are motivating for all students, not just boys. Why then don't we see equal levels of disengagement from the school-sanctioned practices of literacy between the genders? Why do boys disengage more readily than girls?

Many researchers point to the predominantly feminine environments of elementary and middle school instruction (particularly in literacy) as a prime source of boys' disengagement and underachievement in literacy (Barrs, 2000; Dressman, 1997; Dutro, 2001; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Martino, 1995, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Millard, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Young & Brozo, 2001). As boys become more aware of themselves as actors within a gender regime (typically during the

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middle school years), they begin to adopt markers of masculinity and reject markers of femininity in their construction of a gender performance that will facilitate their induction into a favored social clique. Why boys are more adamant about rejecting anything associated with femininity than girls are about rejecting markers of masculinity is not well understood. Martino (2000a, 2000b) suggests that homophobia is the driving force behind such rejections, although he does not address the question of why homophobia should be stronger among boys than among girls. To be seen as a "sissy" raises more hackles among adults and peers than to be seen as a "tomboy."

Whatever the source of this double standard, it remains clear that rejection of some forms of literacy is a standard feature of the masculine "identity kit" (Gee, 1989) that many boys appropriate in adolescence. Reading widely and well, and with good cheer, becomes strongly associated with femininity, and hence serves as a litmus test in the social negotiation of boys' gender identities. Boys who transgress these gender boundaries may risk especially virulent social ostracism (Martino, 1999, 2000a).

Boys' Vernacular Literacy Practices

Despite the exclusion of the label "reader" from the masculine identity kits appropriated by many adolescent boys, it would be a mistake to call such boys aliterate. Close study of the literacy practices of middle school and adolescent boys reveals a paradox. While many boys refuse to identify themselves as readers, openly denigrating reading as something irrelevant to their lives, most boys actually do read, some quite voraciously (Hinchman, et al., 2003; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Many boys do not reject reading per se, but rather school-defined norms of reading, choosing instead to engage with texts that are considered "disreputable" by school standards (and

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hence, "not really reading") in order to resist what they perceive as encroaching external control over their identities (Newkirk, 2002). Disaffected girls often take this line of resistance, too (Bintz, 1993). The "pedagogy of control" that privileges a narrow range of literacy practices as dominant erects boundaries of legitimacy that often exclude students' vernacular literacies (O'Brien, Stewart & Moje, 1995). To indulge in an alternative literacy outside of the school establishment's literacy norms is to assert one's individuality and gender identity. Inside of this framework are arguments that examine the textual content of the literacy curriculum as well as that of students' preferred kinds of reading to find sources of disengagement from literacy.

What kinds of texts most engage boy readers? Not surprisingly, boys' favorite types of reading material are not often in great supply in school or classroom libraries (Worthy, 1996; Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999). Also not surprisingly, boys' least favorite types of reading material are often abundant in schools (Worthy, Moorman, Turner, 1999). Texts that are most likely to engage boy readers tend to be short, highly visual (both in description and graphic accompaniment), challenging to a boy's notions about the world, edgy, closely connected to real life (even in a metaphoric sense, as is the case with fantasy novels), current and humorous (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm, 2002; Worthy, 1996). Broadly, genre fiction (such as science fiction, fantasy, horror and mystery), series fiction, magazines, and graphic novels and comic books constitute the texts of many boys' vernacular literacies (Cavazos-Kottke, 2006; Hall & Coles, 1999; Nell, 1988; Newkirk, 2002). However, few teachers surveyed were inclined to honor these reading preferences for inclusion in the literacy curriculum, despite evidence that so-called "light" reading does not stunt children's literacy

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Several authors have explored the instructional implications of our knowledge about students' reading preferences. Brozo and Schmelzer (1997) advocate for greater representation of positive male archetypes in the shared reading materials used in literacy classrooms as one means of orienting boys toward engagement with reading. Like arguments for bilingual education that stress building early success into students' educational experience by teaching content area coursework in students' native language, Brozo argues that boys must be hooked with material that speaks to their life experience as boys (Young & Brozo, 2001). Other authors (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm, 2002) present similar arguments for changing the content of literacy instruction to better incorporate boys' reading preferences.

Other researchers urge caution in taking such findings at face value, however. Dressman (1997), Bintz (1993) and Smith and Wilhelm (2002) assert that children's and adolescents' reading preferences are never stable constructs, but are instead highly context-sensitive as young people perform different aspects of their identity. What a boy is interested in reading at home today might be very different from what he expresses an interest in reading at school tomorrow, and both preferences may in turn differ radically from what he is motivated to read next week. Young (Young & Brozo, 2001) and Barrs (2000) both note that simply substituting current texts for more "boy-friendly" reading materials can be just as oppressive to readers as the status quo. Indeed, if boys remain inclined to define themselves in opposition to school norms of literacy, shifting norms could simply lead to resistance on a different front as the institutionalization of vernacular literacies might strip such reading materials of their original appeal

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(Alvermann, 1998; Dressman, 1997; Neilsen, 1998). In the words of William

Shakespeare, "If all the year were playing holidays, / To sport would be as tedious as to

work" (1974, p. 851). The boy in a recent MAD Magazine feature who throws away the

new Eminem CD, proclaiming it "totally ruined" because his mother bought it for him

expresses the same sentiment (Hempel & Sinberg, 2005, p. 23). Barrs (2000) instead

advocates not changing the texts, but rather changing boys' orientation toward them,

finding better ways to engage them on an aesthetic level.

Choice

A different solution, proposed by many researchers, is to disrupt the opposition

between vernacular and dominant literacies by building as many opportunities as possible

into the literacy curriculum for students to choose both reading materials that interest

them and means of expressing their insights about those readings (Appleby, 1989; Bintz,

1993; Fink, 1995; Guzzetti, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe & Hardenbrook, 2002; Hektner &

Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Hunt, 1970; Millard, 1998; Whalen & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991;

Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999). A "permeable curriculum" (Dyson, 1993, 2003) that

actively incorporates students' personal interests, "unofficial" texts and vernacular

literacies into the classroom discourse is a model for nurturing intrinsic motivation that

may even extend beyond the literacy classroom to other content areas (Alvermann, 1998;

Hidi, 1990; Neilsen, 1998). This line of argument dovetails neatly with those calling for

increased sensitivity to the purposes students bring to literacy activity (e.g., Duke,

Purcell-Gates, Hall & Tower, 2006), which finds its roots in Dewey (1938). This is not a

case of dumbing down the curriculum or letting the inmates run the asylum, as none of

these studies support teachers' total abdication of authority for determining the direction

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of literacy instruction. Rather, the teacher's role is reconceived as facilitator of individuals' literacy development, bringing instructional goals within children's zones of proximal development and within sight of children's immediate experience (Alvermann, 1998).

Guthrie and Wigfield (2001) synthesize these contextual insights into what motivates children to engage in literacy in their engagement model of reading development. In their model, particular instructional processes and contexts positively influence the cognitive, motivational and social aspects of engagement. Their extensive list of characteristics of learning environments that support engagement with literacy includes, among other items, the following elements: connections between the curriculum and students' personal experiences; teacher support for students' autonomy in choosing learning goals and reading materials; use of interesting texts for instruction; collaboration with peers for social construction of knowledge; personalized and student-centered evaluation; and, teachers' active involvement in developing individuals' reading skills and repertoire. They caution that a classroom that exhibits only one or two of these characteristics may do little to increase students' engagement, and that an overall coherence of instructional processes is necessary. Strategies should be integrated and coordinated to create an entire classroom culture that supports engaged reading. Over the past decade, a number of instructional paradigms have been designed to do just that. In the following section, I will discuss two of these: Literature Circles and Book Club.

Literature Circles and Book Club Defined

Despite their many similarities, Book Club and Literature Circles are not interchangeable terms. Book Club was developed in the early 1990's by a team of

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researchers led by Taffy Raphael and Susan McMahon (see Raphael & McMahon, 1994) as a teaching strategy that includes four major components, all of which are experienced within the course of a single instructional period: Community Share, Reading, Writing/Representing, and Book Club discussion. Community Share is a time for whole group discussion and/or instruction. Any direct teaching of literary concepts or language skills takes place during this time, as does whole class discussion of ideas raised by the reading or by small group discussions. Reading is the time set aside for reading texts, typically involving individual silent reading, although large- or small-group oral reading might also be utilized. The period of Writing/Representing gives individual students a chance to reflect on what they have read, in the form of either a written journal or an artistic response in a particular medium. Students may write/represent in response to a prompt offered by the teacher or may be encouraged to respond freely, reflecting their individual reactions to a given text. The Book Club phase of the lesson is the heart of this instructional approach, a phase during which students break into small groups to share their writing/representations and to discuss both teacher- and student-generated questions about the reading material. While the order of these phases may vary within a given instructional period, all four are necessary components of the Book Club program as envisioned by Raphael and McMahon. In its original conception, Book Club was more widely implemented with younger students than with secondary students, among whom Literature Circles were the discussion strategy of choice.

Literature Circles is also an instructional strategy developed by a number of action researchers in the 1990's to create more authentic, discussion-based contexts for engaging with literature in the middle school and secondary language arts curriculum (see

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Daniels, 2002). In contrast with Book Club, which specifies four distinct activities to be engaged in within a single instructional period, Literature Circles is a more informal strategy based on eleven principles for increasing authenticity of classroom literacy experience. A Literature Circles classroom incorporates *student choice* of reading material and *small temporary groups* of students who are free to *form new groups in response to new book choices*. *Different groups of students can read different books*, in contrast to Book Club, in which the whole class usually reads a core text. Literature Circle activities should be implemented according to a *regular and predictable schedule* and student small group discussions are to be guided by *students' notes*, taken during reading. Discussion topics are to be *student generated* and small group discussions should be marked by *natural conversation*, that is, students talking about what they have read in a manner similar to how they might converse about books outside of the classroom. In a Literature Circles classroom, the *teacher serves as a facilitator* to encourage discussion, often participating actively within small-group discussions rather than acting as a monitor or a purveyor of discussion questions. *Evaluation is collaborative*, with teacher and students working together both to determine standards for assessment and to evaluate the quality of students' Literature Circle participation. Finally – and for Daniels (2002), most importantly – a sense of *playfulness* should pervade the entire experience.

As originally conceived, Literature Circles are more informal than Book Club, to the extent that there is no set of prescribed activities that constitute a Literature Circles experience. However, as Daniels (2002) acknowledges, one of the most popular means of introducing Literature Circles to students is to provide students with "role sheets" that

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specify particular tasks for individuals to perform in the group discussion. The original

intent of role sheets was to provide a launch pad upon which natural conversation about

books could begin. As students become as comfortable conversing about books within

the classroom as they would feel conversing about other topics of personal interest

outside of school, the role sheets were supposed to disappear. Unfortunately, according to

Daniels (2002), some teachers found comfort in holding students accountable to

particular roles, and thus instead of being used as a key to unlock conversation about

books, the role sheets themselves often became the end of conversation rather than the

means. In many quarters Literature Circles became synonymous with role sheets rather

than with free-flowing, authentic conversation about books. Daniels has objected to this

characterization, and in his most recent book about Literature Circles has made a

strenuous appeal for the original intentions of the strategy.

Benefits of Book Clubs[1]

Several authors suggest that book club activities may increase motivation because

the structure of such activities aids students in becoming more self-determined learners.

According to the self-determination theory of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), students

will be more motivated to engage in activities that satisfy their needs for relatedness,

competence and autonomy. Such activities can satisfy adolescents' needs for relatedness

by presenting opportunities for peer interactions (Combs, 2003; Raphael, Goatley,

McMahon & Woodman, 1995; Riddle, 1996) as well as for informal interactions with

teachers and more knowledgeable others (e.g., McMahon & Raphael, 1997). Teachers in

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[1] For the sake of readability, I have chosen to use the general lower-case term "book clubs" to embrace both Literature Circles and Book Club activities as well as small-group discussion activities that closely resemble either strategy but may leave out one or more key element of the originally conceived instructional paradigm. I will use the upper-case Literature Circles and Book Club when speaking specifically about the original programs as envisioned by their designers.

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book club-oriented classrooms report more inclusive discussions (Ahang, 1999; Chandler, 1997; George & Stix, 2000; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000), with more students participating in small- and whole-group conversations and demonstrating respect for the diversity of their peers' opinions. In one classroom, a sense of relatedness was nurtured by engaging parents and students in book club activities, increasing home/school connections (Dias-Mitchell & Harris, 2001). Other authors suggest that the informal, low-stakes atmosphere of conversation about books has a positive impact on students' sense of competence as readers by increasing their self-efficacy for reading and discussion (e.g., Blum, Lipsett & Yocom, 2002) and by bolstering students' confidence in their own ideas (Katz & Kuby, 2001/02; Kong & Fitch, 2002/03). Chandler (1997) reports that students who participated in a summer book club program returned to school with greater confidence in their ability to formulate "valid readings" (that is, evidence-based assertions; see Rosenblatt, 1978), which they promptly displayed in similar literacy activities during the regular school year. Finally, allowing students a high degree of choice in reading materials and discussion topics, as well as giving them opportunities to participate in the evaluation process have been singled out as elements of book club activities that increase students' sense of autonomy (Burns, 1998; Katz & Kuby, 2001/02; Noll, 1994; Riddle 1996).

Beyond those authors who have argued that book club activities motivate students by increasing their sense of competence or expectancy for success in reading, several other authors have made the case that book clubs motivate by also working on the value end of the Expectancy-Value model of motivation (e.g., Eccles, Wigfield & Schiefele, 1998). By giving students greater ownership over the entire reading experience, from

book selection to guiding and evaluating class discussions of books, students may come to value reading as a vital part of their adolescent identity (Raphael, Goatley, McMahon & Woodman, 1995; Raphael, Kehus & Damphousse, 2001). Lesperance (2002) observed that students who participated in a school-wide book club came to value recreational reading more as they perceived that their personal reading interests were validated through book club activities, while Ahang (1999) found that students enjoyed and valued a wider range of reading materials through their exposure to other students' reading interests in book club activities. As Hall (2003) notes in "The 'Oprahfication' of Literacy," the kinds of literacy practices enacted in book clubs have become a defining feature of vernacular literacies in the past decade, making the book club format a more authentic context for the study of literature than the traditional close, analytical reading approach.

While the above theories can help illuminate a general relationship between participation in book club activities and motivation for reading, many authors have argued that book clubs may be especially effective with adolescents because they address this age group's unique developmental needs. Raphael, Kehus and Damphousse (2001) make the case that Book Club accommodates young adolescents' physical needs by providing opportunities for movement around the classroom, which can help students cope with their sometimes wildly fluctuating energy levels. Book clubs can capitalize on adolescents' newly developed formal operational skills by offering opportunities for perspective-taking (Raphael & McMahon, 1994), and for "vicariously [experiencing] events they might not want to live out, but need to ponder and imaginatively explore" (Smith, 2000, p. 31). Such "subjunctive engagement with text" (Broughton, 2002, p. 35)

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is a unique affordance of adolescent cognition that can also aid the grand task of adolescent social/emotional development, the need to construct a personal identity (Erickson, 1963). In addition to the vicarious experiences garnered from reading, the very structure of book club activities provides adolescents with direct experiences with peers who play such a vital role in adolescent socialization (Raphael, Kehus & Damphousse, 2001).

While the bulk of the literature on book clubs has argued strongly for a relationship between participation in book club activities and positive attitudes toward and increased motivation for engaging in multiple literacy practices, a small number of studies have explored the consequences of book club participation on adolescents' gender identity development. Smith (2000), Dutro (2001) and Broughton (2002) noted that the low stakes discussion among small groups of peers that is at the heart of book club activities empowered both girls and boys to take more critical stances toward gender regimes within their classrooms and to construct more flexible, comfortable gender identities for themselves. Dutro's (2001) observational study of a Book Club approach in a middle school classroom revealed that as boys' engagement with the text intensified, policing of gender boundaries disappeared. Indeed, high status boys who had given the most stereotypical gender performances at the start of the observation period were transformed into avid readers of books from the "American Girl" series. This suggests that gendered resistance to dominant literacy practices might be addressed more effectively by nurturing a classroom culture in which boys directly engage with texts than by forcing boys to confront latent assumptions about gender through critical literacy activities.

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To summarize, research suggests that an effective means for overcoming many boys' resistance to active participation in academic literacy practices is to implement a comprehensive program that privileges (among other features) student autonomy through self-selection of personally interesting texts and student-centered discussion. Book Club and Literature Circles are two frameworks for instruction that incorporate and coordinate many of the best practices identified by research as especially motivating for adolescent readers, incorporating self-selection, aesthetic engagement and a strong social component into a permeable approach to language arts instruction that values students' vernacular literacy practices. A few key studies have further demonstrated that such programs can play a special part in disrupting the development of a gender regime that alienates many boys from active participation in academic literacy practices. However, there are a number of limitations in the current literature on book club activities and gender discourse that the present study was designed to address.

For one, the majority of studies on book club based classrooms have focused exclusively on the tasks in which students engage in such contexts. The chief (and often times only) source of data in these studies is the in-class discourse of students involved in small- and large-group discussions, with very little consideration of the texts that are the subject of those discussions (e.g., Johnson, 2000; McMahon & Goatley, 1995). Only one of the studies of book club based classrooms has analyzed the texts that students choose to read (Dutro, 2001), and none of the studies have analyzed the processes by which students select reading materials in the context of such programs. In this study, I sought to document and analyze the texts that a group of middle school boys chose to read in the

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context of a book club based classroom in which students self-selected personally interesting texts that formed the basis of their literacy instruction.

Secondly, none of the published studies on Book Club or Literature Circle classrooms have attempted to document the vernacular literacy practices of students to determine the extent to which those practices manifest themselves in academic literacy events. In other words, despite the promise of such permeable instructional contexts for honoring students' extracurricular funds of knowledge, the published literature has neither documented nor analyzed what happens when adolescents are given a high degree of freedom to cross boundaries between vernacular and academic literacy practices. The work of Dyson (1993, 2003) on young elementary school students learning to write has analyzed children's extracurricular funds of knowledge and explored the ways in which those vernacular literacy practices permeate academic contexts. However, there is not a comparable study of the vernacular literacy practices of adolescent boys in a similarly permeable classroom environment for reading instruction. In this study, I sought to document the vernacular literacy practices of a class of middle school boys in order to compare them with the academic literacy practices in which they engaged to determine the extent to which the borders between literacy practices actually became permeable in a classroom structured around students' self-selected texts.

Thirdly, the majority of the published studies on book club based classrooms present either one-shot or short-term observations of classroom interactions, rather than a longitudinal analysis. This is ironic given many authors' claims that such activities can inspire once reluctant readers to develop a long-term reading habit. In this study, I documented and analyzed students' reading selections over the course of a full academic

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year to examine what kinds of changes took place in students' academic and vernacular literacy practices.

Fourth, despite the claim that students had better attitudes toward reading after participating in book clubs, none of the publications reviewed here offers a measurement of attitude, only one (Raphael & McMahon, 1994) makes comparisons with a non-book club based classroom, and none draw comparisons between students within a book club based classroom. This begs the question: how do we know that the students had better attitudes, and what or whom are those attitudes better than? In this study, I attempted to address this gap in the literature by taking multiple quantitative measurements of attitude toward reading in two book club based language arts classes to make comparisons between individuals and groups of students within those classes and to explore whether there were significant differences between, for example, boys and girls of different reading abilities within the same classroom over the course of the year.

In summary, I sought in this study to document and analyze the vernacular and academic literacy practices of middle school boys in the context of a language arts classroom that scaffolds instruction on students' self-selected reading materials and on book club style interactions. My goal was to draw comparisons between individuals and groups of students within two book club based language arts classes (both taught by the same teacher) in terms of both the literacy practices they made visible over the course of a school year and the attitudes toward reading for multiple purposes they expressed on quantitative and qualitative assessments of reading attitude. I hope through this study to enhance the adolescent literacy literature by documenting both the vernacular and academic literacy practices of a class of middle school boys over the course of a full

academic year, and by comparing these practices with those of girls in the same class. These results should also enhance the teacher education literature by providing insight into the ways in which a teacher can fulfill a consultative role in facilitating individual students' literacy development in a permeable classroom.

This study was guided by four overarching research questions:

1. What are the vernacular literacy practices of a class of middle school boys and what kinds of texts do these boys engage with in those practices?

2. How and to what extent do these boys' vernacular literacies become visible within a language arts program structured around students' self-selected texts?

3. How and to what extent do the vernacular and academic literacy practices of these boys differ from those of the girls within the same class? and,

4. What attitudes toward vernacular and academic literacy practices do these boys hold, how do they compare with the attitudes of other students, and how do those attitudes change over the course of an academic year in a book club based classroom?

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CHAPTER 3

Methods

Chapter Overview

Observations and interviews for this study took place at Harwell Middle School in

the Homestead Public School District over the course of the 2004-2005 school year. This

school was chosen because of Mr. Connors' unusual approach to teaching reading, which

has been briefly discussed in prior chapters and will be described with more detail below.

The demographics of the school and district population also provided a good combination

of the demographic profiles of surrounding school districts in the region. I will first

profile the district and school before telescoping down to a discussion of the particular

classroom that was involved in this study, expanding on the description previously given

in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Following discussion of the setting, I will present an

account of the methods used in this study to answer the research questions presented at

the conclusion of Chapter 2. Included in this account will be information on the

participants, data gathering and analysis strategies, and a timeline demonstrating how

different methods were employed during different phases of the school year.

Setting

The Community

The Homestead Public School District serves approximately 3,000 K-12 students

living on the western side of Ilium, a mid-size city in Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

Officially, Homestead is an "urban fringe" district. It encompasses two large residential

areas within Ilium's city limits as well as all of the unincorporated neighborhoods

between Ilium and Birch Creek, the closest suburban community to the west. Ilium's

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population is predominantly working and middle class, with few observable extremes of wealth or poverty. Traveling westward from downtown Ilium along the city's main east-west artery, you officially enter Homestead by passing underneath a railroad bridge upon which freight trains shuttle between a complex of four large automobile production facilities. These factories constitute a vertically integrated system that takes in raw steel and scrap metal at one end and turns out new, fully assembled automobiles at the other end. They also comprise the single largest employer of working households in Homestead, which lies snugly between the Ilium and Birch Creek Public School Districts not just geographically, but also economically and demographically.

The median household income in the Homestead Public School District was $51,243 in 2002, slightly above the state average and roughly midway between those of the Ilium ($33,220) and Birch Creek ($64,445) public school districts (Standard and Poor's [S&P], 2003). Median housing values for the three districts are similarly ranked. The distribution of households by income in Homestead is relatively homogeneous across the seven income brackets used by Standard & Poor's, whereas the household income distributions for Ilium and Birch Creek skew in opposite directions (see Table A1). As indicated by Table A1, this relatively even distribution across income categories is more reflective of the overall distribution in the state. In addition to the automotive industry, major employers of Homestead citizens include the State of Michigan (many state government offices lie within Homestead and its immediate vicinities) and the service industry, as Homestead's neighborhoods orbit one of Ilium's largest commercial zones. While 81% of adults in Ilium have at least a high school diploma and 27.1% have a Bachelor's degree or higher, 90.4% of Homestead adults have at least a high school

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diploma and 36.1% have a Bachelor's degree or higher, and for Birch Creek the figures

are 91.6% and 34.4% respectively (S&P, 2003). Similarly, Homestead is more like Birch

Creek in terms of the number of students classified as economically disadvantaged as a

percentage of overall student enrollment. While 57.1% of the students in Ilium qualify for

free or reduced-price lunches, 16.6% of Homestead students and 13.9% of Birch Creek

students receive these services. These figures compare to a state mean of 30.7%, and a

county mean of 18.9% (S&P, 2003).

Other features of the Homestead community indicate a similar blend of urban and

suburban trends. As Table A2 shows, the distribution of Homestead's student population

by racial/ethnic background forms a middle ground between the race/ethnicity profiles of

Ilium and Birch Creek. Proceeding from the urban environment of Ilium to the semi-rural

suburbs of Birch Creek, the proportion of White students increases, while the proportions

of Black, Hispanic and Native American students decreases. Although the relative

proportions of Birch Creek's student body are closer to the state averages for most

categories, the greater representation of minority students in Homestead should afford a

wider perspective on the diversity of literacy practices within the community. Finally, the

passing and excelling rates of Homestead students on the most recently available results

of the state's assessment of student progress stand midway between the rates posted by

Ilium and Birch Creek across grade levels and subjects.

The School

Harwell Middle School is situated on the far east side of Homestead, only three

blocks from the automobile plant that stands on the border between the Ilium and

Homestead districts, and four blocks from one of Ilium's three large comprehensive high

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schools. Harwell is, in fact, much closer to this high school than it is to Homestead's own

high school, which is more centrally located in the district. The neighborhoods

surrounding Harwell are solidly working class, filled with the modest, mid-20th century

homes of automobile plant workers. The area also serves as home to several union halls,

representing the various trades employed at the factories, at least two bars frequented by

factory employees, many small and home-based automobile repair facilities, and the local

VFW and American Legion posts. There is not a more traditional rust-belt neighborhood

in all of Homestead, or perhaps in all of Ilium.

Students come to Harwell Middle School, Homestead's only campus for fifth and

sixth graders, from four elementary schools. They leave Harwell for the Homestead's

single junior high (grades 7 and 8) and, eventually, Homestead High School. Harwell

itself is shaped like a stout letter H, with large rectangular east and west wings united by

a thick central hub. The hub contains the school's library/media center and the

administration offices. The east wing of the school contains the school's gymnasium,

cafetorium, swimming pool, art and music rooms. The west wing is the home of the

guidance offices, all of the regular classrooms and all of the student lockers. Fifth grade

classrooms are south of the central hallways leading past the library to the east wing, and

sixth grade classrooms are to the north. Students in both grades are assigned to two-

teacher teams for their core academic instruction, and are able to choose between choir,

band and orchestra for music. Due to budgetary constraints, there are no foreign language

course options for students at Harwell.

All students at Harwell are assigned to a team of two teachers, one of whom is

their homeroom teacher. Teaching duties for the core content areas are shared between

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the two teachers, and students switch between their teachers multiple times each day, as well as report to various special classes, such as PE, music and art in their homeroom groups.

The Classroom

During the 2004-2005 school year, Mr. Connors taught language arts to 48 students[1] who were enrolled in two homerooms, one assigned to Mr. Connors and the other assigned to Ms. Julie Price. Teaching duties for each homeroom were divided such that Connors was responsible for language arts and science instruction and Price was responsible for math and social studies instruction. Students began each day in their respective homerooms and switched classrooms at least twice daily in order to receive instruction in all core areas of the curriculum.

Reading in a variety of formats and for a variety of purposes was built into the general routine of both Connors' and Price's classrooms, independent of reading instruction in the content areas. Both homerooms began each day with 20 to 30 minutes of Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time, during which students were expected to read silently from self-selected texts. No restrictions were placed on the kinds of texts that students could read during these periods, although as will be discussed later in this study, students mostly read texts that they had selected to read to fulfill language arts assignments during their DEAR time. In addition to the regularly scheduled DEAR times, both teachers also had their classes engage in brief, impromptu DEAR periods after

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[1] Mr. Connors and Ms. Price began the year with a group of 50 students split evenly between their two homerooms. One student in each homeroom moved out of the school district during the first trimester, and mid-way through the second trimester, one new student moved into the district and was added to Mr. Connors homeroom. At various times during the school year, a handful of students were moved from Mr. Connors' and Ms. Price's homerooms into other teachers' homeroom classes, and vice versa. Forty-eight students were in Connors' classes for at least two trimesters and participated in all major reading assignments, and the dataset for this study is limited to information about these 48 students.

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students completed assigned tasks in independent work times and frequently included DEAR in the plans they left for substitutes.

Both classrooms featured small libraries of books from a variety of genres from which students could check out reading materials (see Figures B1 and B2). These classroom libraries were organized by genre, with Connors' library containing separate baskets marked Realistic Fiction, Historical Fiction, Fantasy, Science Fiction and Biography, which are the five genres from which students were to select books for the Genre Project. Price's classroom library also featured a reading corner, a small carpeted area with bean bag chairs and special lighting where students could spend their DEAR time. This area also included a reading recommendation wall, where students (and Ms. Price) could post notecards with comments on books they had read (see Figure B3). It should be noted at this point that neither classroom library featured any reading materials other than books, which represents an implicit constraint on the permeability of the classroom context. While students were not explicitly constrained from reading non-book texts during DEAR sessions, the lack of availability of magazines, newspapers or even non-print texts in the classroom libraries did restrict choices of students who had not brought reading materials from home. Nevertheless, the school library did contain a wide selection of magazines, newspapers and videotapes for student check out, in addition to books. Connors' and Price's students made regular weekly class visits to the school library over the course of the year, and during DEAR time, Connors would allow one student at a time to visit the school library to check our or return materials.

Both teachers included read-alouds from popular novels in their regular daily routines. During the first trimester of the 2004-2005 school year, Connors read *A Series*

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of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning (Snicket, 1999) to his homeroom, while to her

homeroom, Price read *Jaguar* (Smith, 1997) and *Joey Pigza Loses Control* (Gantos,

2000). Additionally, Price read the following books to both her and Connors' homeroom

classes during the second and third trimesters: *The Magician's Nephew* (Lewis, 1955),

Number the Stars (Lowry, 1990), *Warriors Don't Cry* (Beals, 1994), and *Joey Pigza*

Swallowed the Key (Gantos, 2000). Read-alouds were typically scheduled as buffers after

content area lessons and before whole class movements, such as to lunch, recess, special

classes or the other teacher's classroom. These read-aloud periods usually lasted between

10 and 20 minutes, always involved the teacher reading a chapter (or substantial portion

thereof) from a book, and were never followed by extension activities. Read-alouds

would occasionally be interrupted for definitions of unfamiliar words, questions for

clarification or brief commentary by the teacher on particular moments in the narrative. *A*

Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning was especially suited to this style of

read-aloud, as the book's narrator frequently interrupts the story to define words he uses

in relating the story, often giving off-beat definitions that are tangentially related to the

common uses of the words, affording Connors the opportunity to discuss the denotative

and connotative meanings of the words with his students.

Beyond these routines and activities that both teachers built into their daily

schedules to promote reading, Connors' language arts curriculum, as would be expected,

involved a great deal of reading. As discussed in the first chapter of this study, Mr.

Connors' approach to language arts instruction places a premium on attempting to bridge

the gap between students' vernacular and academic literacy practices in an effort to

promote more positive attitudes toward reading. Each trimester of the 2004-2005 school

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year featured a unique suite of activities geared toward that end, but incorporating students' self-selected texts into reading instruction, emphasizing the development of visualization skills, and maintaining a book club framework were components of Connors' language arts curriculum that persisted across the three grading periods.

First trimester. During the first trimester, a typical day in Connors' language arts class began with a shared reading of a selected text, usually from the *Daybook of Critical Reading and Writing* (Claggett, Reid & Vinz, 1999, hereafter referred to as "the *Daybook*"), followed by a writing response activity. The response activity was often taken directly from the activities presented in the *Daybook* with each selection. Beyond the published activities, Connors would also challenge students to identify "picture words" in the reading selection, words that conjured up especially vivid images in students' minds as they read. In addition to the *Daybook*, each student also had a composition book that they used as a journal in which to complete follow-up activities not included in the *Daybook*, engage in various response activities to selected texts from sources other than the *Daybook* and write drafts of essays for major writing assignments. In these journals, students would frequently be asked to record the picture words that they identified in the text and sketch the images that these words conjured in their minds. In this way, Connors would both engage students with the intended focus of the activities presented in the *Daybook* (such as how to identify point of view in a story) and reinforce students' abilities to visualize meaning from text, the skill that Connors saw as the cornerstone to effective (and affective) engagement with print. Connors checked students' *Daybooks* and journals each night and assigned daily grades based solely on completion of the day's activities.

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Connors' language arts students were also expected to complete a course of independent reading during this first trimester. Students were to read a certain number of pages from self-selected "chapter books" (defined very loosely by Connors as books containing "at least 100 pages") each month. The precise number of books required was negotiated individually between Connors and his students, in accordance with each student's reading level and the particular length and reading level of books that the student chose. Students kept weekly reading logs in which they recorded the number of pages they read each day, the author and title of each book they read, and a brief summary of what happened in the reading they accomplished each day. After completing each book, students were expected to write short book reviews to be shared with other students to recommend (or in very rare cases steer other students away from) further reading. Every two weeks, Connors assigned independent reading grades by assessing the students' reading logs for completion and for the number of days on which a parent had signed the log to confirm that the student had read at home for at least 30 minutes. These grades were given the greatest weight in the calculation of students' cumulative language arts grade for the trimester.

Consistently throughout the first trimester, Connors structured activities in his language arts classes to integrate students' independent reading with the mini-lessons derived from the *Daybook*. To illustrate how Connors brought students' self-selected independent reading into his language arts lessons, I provide the following description of a typical day's activities in Connors' class during the first trimester. This lesson took place early in the school year, soon after students had been taught the concept of "picture words," and it began with Connors reading aloud the following information from the

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Daybook about point of view:

> A Story's Point of View. The third ingredient for a successful story is point of
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> view – the angle from which a story is told. If the point of view changes, so does
>
> the story. Active readers know that understanding point of view is as easy as
>
> deciding who the narrator (or storyteller) is. Read another excerpt from *Danny the*
>
> [sic] *Champion of the World*. As you read, highlight or circle any information you
>
> find about the narrator. Use the response notes to make observations about what
>
> point of view the author is using. (p. 45)

Connors then gave students approximately seven minutes in which to read the selection,

and as suggested in the directions given in the *Daybook*, he encouraged the students not

only to write "response notes" about point of view in the margins of their *Daybooks* but

also to circle any "picture words" they encountered while reading. After soliciting student

volunteers to share their response notes with the whole class, Connors directed students

to this follow-up question given in the *Daybook*:

> How would the scene the narrator describes be different if it were told from the
>
> father's point of view? Use what you know about Danny and his father to rewrite
>
> the kite-flying scene from the father's point of view. Be as creative as you like,
>
> but make sure you give readers an adult angle on the events. (p. 46)

Students were given a few minutes to write responses to this question in their *Daybooks*,

then encouraged to share their responses first with a partner and then with the whole

class.

Connors then directed students to share the picture words that they had circled as

they read the selection. In their journals, students recorded their picture words and made

sketches of the scenes that they imagined in their minds as they read the selection. After

sharing their sketches with partners and discussing how their sketches were inspired by

the picture words presented in the selection, students were challenged to find picture

words in the books that they had been reading for the independent reading component of

language arts and sketch the mental images that those words inspired. Connors then

called on students to share the picture words and sketches they made from their

independent reading selections. As a further challenge, Connors asked students to think

about the point of view in their independent reading selections, calling on volunteers to

share their insights. During the next session of language arts, students were given a few

minutes to revisit the selection from *Danny Champion of the World* (Dahl, 1975), review

the picture words they had previously identified and enhance the sketches they had made

in preparation for a closed-book (but open-journal) "visualization quiz" (see Figure B4).

This basic lesson structure, in which students explored a literary element – such as

characterization or point of view – and a reading comprehension strategy – such as

visualization – in both a short *Daybook* selection and self-selected texts was repeated

throughout the first trimester. During the subsequent trimesters, Connors continued to

utilize this framework, although less frequently as students' self-selected texts were given

more prominence in in-class activities and as more time was devoted to building

students' writing skills. Because my primary interest was in students' literacy practices as

revealed through their text selections for academic and recreational purposes, my data

gathering was limited to the reading activities in Connors' language arts class. In the next

sections, I will thus only describe how the reading curriculum for the respective

trimesters reflected Connors' commitments to student choice, building visualization skills

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and social practices in the literacy classroom, themes that emerge from the review of the literature on the kinds of classroom contexts that support positive attitudes toward reading and high motivation to read.

Second trimester. While several mini-lessons such as the one described above were presented during the second trimester to reinforce students' ability to visualize meaning from text, Connors also built mini-lessons on other topics, including making personal connections to text and identifying and retelling main events/ideas in different genres of writing. The *Daybook* continued to be a source of reading selections for mini-lessons, but Connors also incorporated readings from *Time for Kids*, a classroom magazine that all students received weekly, and short picture book biographies such as *John Henry* (Lester, 1994) and *Freedom River* (Rappaport, 2000). Connors also used short films, such as *Wallace & Gromit: The Wrong Trousers* (Park, 1993) and *Rikki Tikki Tavi* (Jones, 1975), as texts for students to practice their skills in retelling main events and drawing personal connections to text.

Most of the mini-lessons during the second trimester were based on selections from the novel *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990), which Connors read aloud to the class. During these mini-lessons, students were occasionally given copies of *Maniac Magee* in which to follow along with the read-aloud, but just as often they were challenged to record picture words or other responses to the novel without the aid of the text. This was done to stimulate students' mastery of picture words in both print and oral language. A typical mini-lesson with *Maniac Magee* would involve Connors reading a chapter aloud to the class, during which students would record picture words and attempt to represent the mental images evoked by those words via sketches in their journals. On one occasion,

groups of students expanded upon the sketches they had made individually to recreate a key scene from the novel first in storyboard format, then as a skit that was performed for the whole class.

The main focus of reading instruction during this trimester was on expanding students' exposure to different reading genres through their self-selections. To that end, Connors not only incorporated a greater variety of informational texts into his mini-lessons, but he also introduced the Genre Project, in which students were challenged to select at least one book from each of five genres: fantasy, realistic fiction, science fiction, historical fiction, and biography (see Figure B5 for the assignment sheet Connors gave students). These five genres coincided with the genre divisions used by Connors for his classroom library, and the only restriction that Connors placed on students' selections for this project was length. All selections were to be a minimum of 100 pages long, except for biographies, which were to be at least 60 pages long. This distinction was made in recognition of the different demands made on readers by non-fiction and narrative fiction, Connors' sense that students were relatively inexperienced in reading long-form non-fiction texts, and the large selection of biographies in the school library that contained fewer than 100 pages. Midway through the trimester, Connors added "free choice" as a sixth option for students to select in completing the project because of the relative paucity of science fiction books in the school library.

After finishing a book, students completed book review forms, and students' overall grade for the Genre Project was based on the number of reviews they completed. Connors provided students with a generic book review form for all genres except for biography, which had its own form (see Figures B6, B7 and B8). These reviews focused

on topics such as making text-to-life connections, identifying and retelling main ideas/events, and exploring story elements such as setting, all of which were addressed in mini-lessons. Connors assessed each book review for completion, and then made all book reviews available in a binder for students to peruse and discover additional titles that might pique their interests. At several points throughout the trimester, Connors solicited student volunteers to give brief book chats about their Genre Project selections as well as had students engage in informal, small-group conversations about the books they were currently reading.

Connors' twin emphases on developing students' visualization skills and honoring students' vernacular literacy practices culminated midway through the second trimester in an activity in which Connors encouraged his students to:

> Bring in something that you enjoy reading, something that you think you are interested in reading, something that you can make a picture in your head as you read. ... Many students don't enjoy reading because they approach it as reading words, rather than creating pictures. I want you to think that reading is more fun than you thought it could be by the end of the year.

Connors put no restrictions on the kinds of text that students could bring in for this activity, even encouraging students to bring in video game instruction booklets, owner's manuals for electronic appliances or DVD case inserts, all of which he noted were the kinds of texts that he regularly enjoyed reading.

On the day of the activity, students wrote extensively in their journals about the materials that they brought in. They first wrote a general description of the text they had brought and then a brief explanation of what they most liked about the text. Next, they

shared their texts with each other in small groups, and individual volunteers were solicited to share with the whole class. Connors had the students engage in ten minutes of DEAR with their texts, and students were expected to record picture words in their journals as they read. Finally, students wrote about how the picture words they identified helped them generate mental images as they read and made sketches of those mental images.

Third trimester. Connors' language arts curriculum culminated in the third trimester with the Book Project. Very little class time during this marking period was spent on reading mini-lessons. Most language arts sessions were either devoted to writer's workshop activities or to the Book Project, which built on the skills developed in the reading mini-lessons of the prior trimesters. Connors built more DEAR time into language arts lessons during the third trimester than previously and specified that students read their Book Project selections during that time, unless they had already completed the book. Connors was also out of the classroom for various reasons more often during this trimester than previously, and DEAR time for the Book Project was a routine feature of the plans left for his substitutes. It should also be noted that there were fewer language arts sessions during this last trimester. The annual human growth and development unit was scheduled not only during the third trimester, but also during language arts time, as between Price and Connors, only Connors had the proper certification to teach this material to the two homerooms.

For the Book Project (see Figure B9), students were to select a single book from any genre that was at least 150 pages long (bonus points were offered to students who selected biographies, science fiction, or books with over 250 pages) to read and create a

poster presentation about. These poster presentations represented a culminating exhibition of the concepts students had explored and the reading skills they had developed over the course of the school year. Posters were to contain basic information about the book (e.g., author, title, genre), descriptions of the main character and setting, a retelling of major events in the book (including the chief problem to be solved by the main character and how that problem was resolved), the book's main theme, text-to-life connections, a brief review, and sketches of vivid moments from the story. All of these literary elements had been taught individually via mini-lessons using the *Daybook* or other short texts in conjunction with students' self-selected reading materials during the previous trimesters, and the Book Project gave students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of those topics cumulatively using a text of their own choice.

Connors aided individual students in the selection of appropriately challenging and personally interesting texts for the Book Project during class visits to the school library shortly after assigning the Book Project. Students were also encouraged to bring texts from home or to borrow texts from the classroom library as their reading interests led them. During the library visits, Connors met with all students individually to record their book choices and guided any students who were having trouble finding something interesting to read toward texts that resonated with reading selections they had made and enjoyed in previous activities.

After book selection was completed, students were given one month in which to read their chosen texts and prepare their presentations. During this period, language arts class time was primarily devoted to bolstering students' writing skills in an expository essay unit to prepare for the MEAP writing test, but Connors incorporated brief mini-

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lessons to review each of the literary elements that students were expected to address in their Book Project presentations and encouraged students to focus on reading their Book Project selections during DEAR time. In the week prior to the due date for the Book Project, Connors devoted two language arts sessions to helping students construct their posters, providing each student with poster board upon which to construct their presentations. Markers, colored pencils, construction paper and gluesticks were also provided for student use. The final presentations were scheduled over the course of three language arts sessions, during which writing workshop activities and visits to the semi-annual Scholastic Book Fair were also scheduled in order to maintain variety and student engagement. Activities related to the human growth and development unit were also scheduled during this period in fulfillment of state and district requirements for health instruction. Connors assessed students' Book Project presentations using a simple checklist rubric, and the grade for this presentation constituted the entirety of the reading component of students' language arts grades for this trimester.

Opportunities for choice. As described in the preceding section, Connors' classroom afforded several opportunities for students to self-select reading materials for academic purposes and potentially make their vernacular literacy practices visible within the classroom. The most potentially permeable context was DEAR time, as Connors placed no explicit restrictions on what students could spend their time reading. However, DEAR time was not wholly impermeable; unless students brought texts from home, choices of reading materials were restricted to books from the classroom library and books and periodicals from the school library. The next most potentially permeable context was the culminating activity on visualization skills, as students were explicitly

encouraged to bring a text from home that was effective at conjuring visual images. While Connors described a wide range of texts that students could bring in, from the traditional (books, magazines) to new media (DVD cases, video games), students were restricted to bringing in a single text, and the text did have to include print. Independent Reading (first trimester), the Genre Project (second trimester) and the Book Project (third trimester) represent the least potentially permeable of the academic contexts for which Connors' students were given the opportunity to self-select texts. In all three of these contexts, students were restricted to selecting books, and in the Genre Project, choices were restricted to books falling within five pre-specified genres. Thus, Connors' curriculum was not a completely open-choice environment, but rather offered varying levels of permeability to the texts of students' vernacular literacy practices. Because the potential of a permeable classroom to scaffold students' development in academic literacy practices on their vernacular literacies depends on both the openness of the teacher to those literacies and the willingness of students to take advantage of opportunities to make those literacies visible, the structural and de facto constraints placed on students' text selections for academic purposes are important delimiters to recognize before enumerating the procedures used to document Connors' students' text selections. The second research question of this dissertation was included to assess whether and to what extent boys would take advantage of these opportunities for choice.

Research Design Overview

To document the vernacular and academic literacy practices of a group of sixth-grade boys, I designed a case study (Yin, 2002), patterned after the work of Finders (1997) and Hynds (1997). I spent the 2004-2005 school year at Harwell Middle School

observing and interviewing students in Connors' language arts classes. As will be described in greater detail below, the focus of my data gathering was on the texts that students in these classes selected: 1) to fulfill specific reading assignments in the language arts curriculum; 2) to read during Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) periods; and 3) to interact with outside of school in their free time. The basic unit of documentation and analysis in this study is the *text selection*, defined here as an individual student's interaction with a single text in a particular context, and different data gathering methods were employed to document the text selections that students made for different purposes.

For texts selected by students to fulfill academic assignments, the sources of data were archives of student work in the Genre Project and Book Project saved by Mr. Connors for inclusion in students' reading portfolios, observations of student Book Project presentations and student activities during language arts sessions, observations of read-aloud periods, and interviews with individual students. These records account for choices made over the course of the full academic year by all students in Mr. Connors' homeroom as well as those made by students in Price's homeroom who came to Mr. Connors for language arts instruction.

For texts selected by students for DEAR periods, I observed students in Connors' homeroom during their daily DEAR period at least twice each week during the second and third trimesters of the school year, during which most of their major language arts assignments were completed. I also observed students in both of the homerooms for which Mr. Connors was responsible for language arts instruction during occasional impromptu DEAR periods within regular language arts instructional time.

Finally, to document texts selected by students for extracurricular, recreational purposes, I interviewed a group of 22 focal students on multiple occasions over the course of the second and third trimesters of the school year. These interviews involved both self-reports of recreational reading and text interactions by students and observations of students browsing for personally interesting texts at a local book store and at a school-sponsored book fair.

Participants

The participants in this study were the two sixth grade language arts classes taught by Mr. Ed Connors at Harwell Middle School during the 2004-2005 school year. This age group was chosen because many studies have demonstrated a significant decline in boys' and girls' attitudes toward reading and school in general during the middle/junior high school years, indicating that boys at this age may be particularly vulnerable to disengagement from reading (Andermann & Maehr, 1994; Bean, 1998; Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan & MacIver, 1993; McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995).

Among the 48 students in Connors' two language arts classes were 24 boys and 24 girls. The ethnic composition of the students was as follows: 50% White (14 boys, 10 girls), 31.25% African-American (6 boys, 9 girls), 8.3% Mixed ethnicity (2 boys, 2 girls), 6.25% Latino (2 boys, 1 girls), 2.1% Asian (1 girl), and 2.1% African (1 girl). The average grade equivalent reading level of Connors' students as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test administered at the end of the 2003-2004 school year was 6.64 (SD = 3.24, range = 2 to 13). The average grade equivalent reading level for boys was 6.19 (SD = 3.01, range = 2 to 13), and the average grade equivalent reading level for girls

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was 7.10 (SD = 3.46, range = 3 to 13). This difference was not statistically significant ($t = -0.09364$, $p > 0.1$). In Connors' and Price's classes, each student was assigned a number to be used throughout the year to facilitate record-keeping. These numbers were used in all field notes and other documents in this study to ensure anonymity.

From the whole group of Connors' language arts students, 22 students volunteered to be interviewed further about their reading attitudes and habits over the course of the year. This sample contained 11 boys and 11 girls, and represented the range of ethnic backgrounds found in the two homerooms: 50% White (7 boys, 4 girls), 27% African-American (2 boys, 4 girls), 13.6% Mixed ethnicity (1 boy, 2 girls), 4.5% Latino (1 boy), and 4.5% African (1 girl). The average reading level of this sample was 7.25 (range = 2 to 13) as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test at the end of the 2003-2004 school year. This is higher than the average reading level for the whole group of Connors' language arts students (6.09, range = 3 to 13), but not significantly different ($t=0.669$, $p>0.5$).

Procedures

Figure B10 provides a graphic illustration of the classroom activities, data sources, data analysis strategies, and research questions addressed during each trimester of the 2004-2005 school year. Over the course of the year, I took a concurrent triangulation strategy toward data collection (Creswell, 2003), gathering qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources to find converging information and themes relative to my original research questions. Qualitative data that I gathered for this study included field notes from classroom observations, transcriptions of audiotaped open-ended and semi-structured interviews with focal students and conversations with Mr.

Connors, samples of written work – including book reports – completed by focal students, and lists of books selected by all students in both homerooms over the course of the school year. Quantitative data I gathered included aggregate and individual results from the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test given to all students at the conclusion of the prior school year, a reading attitude assessment (the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey), administered by Connors at the beginning and end of the school year, and aggregate and individual results from a word reading assessment administered by Connors during the third trimester of the school year. What follows in this section is an in-depth discussion of the data gathering and analysis procedures employed in this study, organized chronologically.

Data collection for this study began with a series of in-depth conversations with Ed Connors. I spoke with Connors three times during the 2003-04 school year to gather specific information about how he structured his language arts curriculum around students' book choices and his justifications for the different activities he included in that curriculum These conversations were informal and open-ended, and were not audiotaped. Field notes were taken and read back to Connors at the time of the conversation for confirmation and clarification. During the 2004-05 school year, three additional conversations were conducted with Connors – one each trimester – focusing on his assessment of students' progress over the course of the preceding trimester, planned activities for the following trimester, and his background as a reader. These conversations were, like their predecessors, informal and not audiotaped. Field notes taken during these conversations were also shared with Connors for confirmation and clarification.

At the start of the first trimester of the 2004-05 school year, all students in

Connors' language arts classes[2] were administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS; McKenna & Kear, 1990), a 20-item, 4-level Likert-type assessment in which respondents circle a drawing of the cartoon character Garfield that most closely approximates their feelings about each item. Ten items on the survey assess respondents' attitudes toward recreational reading (sample items: "How do you feel about spending free time reading?" "How do you feel about reading for fun at home?"), and ten items assess respondents' attitudes toward academic reading (sample items: "How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?" "How do you feel when it's time for reading class?"). For sixth graders, McKenna and Kear (1990) report a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 for the recreational subscale, 0.81 for the academic subscale, and 0.89 for the full scale, indicating that the ERAS is a highly reliable measure of reading attitude across these two dimensions. Norms for the ERAS were established by a national norming project involving 18,138 students grades 1-6 (including 2,442 sixth graders). For sixth grade, the normed means are as follows: for the recreational subscale, 27.9 (SD = 6.2), for the academic subscale, 24.7 (SD = 5.8) and for the full scale, 52.5 (SD = 10.6).

Connors administered the ERAS as part of his routine instruction in order to gather data about his students' reading habits and attitudes. Scores were calculated and individual results were placed in each student's language arts portfolio to be shared with parents during conferences later in the school year. Individual and aggregate results from the ERAS were provided to the researcher as part of the classes' archival data.

After the ERAS was administered early in the first trimester of the 2004-2005 school year, I gave a brief presentation to both of Connors' language arts classes (as well

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[2] Due to absences, only 41 of the 48 students completed the ERAS at the start of the 2004-2005 school year, and Mr. Connors did not conduct a make-up administration for the absent students.

as to a group of parents who came to the first Parent Night of the school year) to solicit

volunteers for further interviewing, distributing informed consent and assent letters.

Sixteen students (6 boys, 10 girls) responded to the original call for volunteers, returning

signed consent/assent forms midway through the first trimester. Each volunteer was then

individually administered the interview protocol of the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP;

Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1996) at the start of the second trimester. In the

MRP interview, participants discuss particular texts and authors that most interest them,

as well as give a richer account of their reading habits (sample items: "Tell me about the

most interesting story or book you have read this week." "What are some things that get

you really excited about reading books?"). All interviews except one (at the student's and

parents' request) were audiotaped and then transcribed. At the conclusion of the standard

MRP questions, I asked each student to list texts that they had read to fulfill the

independent reading component of the language arts curriculum during the first trimester.

As Connors had not maintained records of the independent reading selections made by

his students during the first trimester, I had to rely on students' recollections of the texts

they selected for this component of the language arts curriculum, which is one limitation

on the comprehensiveness of the dataset's representation of text selections made by focal

students for academic purposes.

Midway through the second trimester, Connors identified five additional boys and

one additional girl whose reading habits he felt might be of interest in this study and who

had expressed a belated interest in participating. These students were immediately given

another copy of the informed consent and assent letters, which were all returned within a

week. As with the first group of focal student volunteers, I administered the MRP

interview protocol to this second wave of volunteers, and all interviews but two (at the student's and parents' request) were audiotaped and transcribed. These students were also asked to list texts that they remembered reading to fulfill the independent reading component of the language arts curriculum during the first trimester. All student interviews were conducted during specials periods (i.e., PE, art), which were usually scheduled between Connors' language arts sessions, as well as during language arts sessions that were not devoted to reading activities. Students were pulled out from the classroom and interviewed in the school library and the school conference room when the library was not available. All focal students were asked to generate their own pseudonyms for this study.

Classroom observations began near the start of the second trimester and continued through the end of the school year. I visited Connors' class two to three times per week in this period, arriving for each observation at the start of the school day in order to observe Connors' homeroom students during DEAR time and stayed until the lunch break. This afforded me the opportunity to observe regularly scheduled DEAR sessions, both language arts class periods taught by Connors (to his and Price's homerooms), read-alouds conducted by Connors with his homeroom, and any additional, impromptu DEAR time incorporated into the morning's activities. Field notes were taken during all observed sessions, focusing primarily on documenting the texts selected by individual students (both focal and non-focal) for DEAR and reading class activities. Students' behaviors with their selected texts were recorded in field notes, as were scripts of teacher behaviors during all reading activities. Text selections made by all students in the Genre Project were documented by examining the notebook containing all book reports students

had submitted, which Connors made available for students to peruse as they sought recommendations for future reading. Text selections made by all students in the Book Project were documented first by observing students during their initial library visits to select books for the project and second by observing the student presentations at the end of the third trimester.

A second wave of interviews with focal students was conducted late in the second trimester after the Genre Project had concluded and extending into the start of the third trimester. These interviews were focused on the texts that the students had selected for the Genre Project and that they had brought to class for the culminating activity on visualization skills (see pp. 51-52). Focal students were first asked to list the texts that they had selected for the Genre Project, both by title and genre (copies of the book reports that students had submitted were supplied by Mr. Connors to help spur students' memories if they were unable to remember all of the titles they had read). For each text that they had read, focal students were asked why they chose that particular text for this assignment, how and where they obtained the text, what the text was about, and what their feelings about the book were. The same questions were asked regarding the texts selected for the culminating activity on visualization skills. Focal students were then asked to identify their most and least favorite texts from those they selected for the Genre Project, as well as their most and least favorite genres of the five included in the project. Finally, focal students were asked to identify any other texts they had been engaging with outside of school and to describe them briefly. All but two of these interviews (at the students' and parents' request) were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim soon thereafter.

Six focal students (3 boys, 3 girls) volunteered for a third and final round of

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interviews that were scheduled late in the third trimester and modeled on the bookstore observation protocols developed by the author in a previous study (Cavazos-Kottke, 2006). For this interview, I met with three of the focal students (2 boys, 1 girl) individually and two of the focal students (2 girls) together at Schuler Books, a large, locally-owned independent bookstore. Each student was given a shopping basket and was told to fill the basket with reading materials that he or she would be interested in reading. The students were given unlimited time to complete this task, and while each student browsed, field notes were taken, focusing on the sections in which students conducted their browsing. Because of transportation issues, one boy who volunteered for the third interview was unable to meet at Schuler Books, but was able to meet at the semi-annual Scholastic Bookfair that was held at Harwell near the end of the third trimester. The same observation and interview protocols as used with the focal students at Schuler Books were followed with the focal student at the Bookfair.

Each student was then interviewed individually (except for the two girls who engaged in their browsing together) about the selections he or she made. For each selection the focal student made, he or she was asked the following questions:

1. Describe this item in your own words.

2. Why did you select this item?

3. What is it about this item that interests you?

Finally, each participant was asked to make a list of texts (either specific titles or genres) that he would have liked to include in the basket but could not find in the bookstore. Answers to the questions were taken down in field notes by the interviewer as these interviews were not audiotaped. Each participant received a $10 gift card to the bookstore

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Data Analysis

Qualitative data (including field notes, interview transcripts and written work produced by focal students relating to their text selections) were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to discover themes within interview and transcript data. Individual documents were read multiple times and categories were constructed from concepts and unifying themes that emerged from the data. On the first reading, transcripts, field notes and student-produced artifacts were read to document titles of texts that students read for academic and vernacular purposes, and a database of text selections was then constructed using Microsoft Access. As discussed earlier, the text selection is the basic unit of analysis for this study, and is defined as an individual text selected by an individual student for a particular academic or vernacular purpose. Thus, a particular book chosen by only one student to fulfill the requirements of a project qualifies as a single text selection, whereas a single book chosen by three different students for various purposes qualifies as three text selections. Fields for title, author, and student number were created and filled in for each text selection upon initial documentation from the field notes. In some cases (most especially among, but not limited to, biographies selected in the Genre Project), precise title and author information about particular text selections was not provided. In these cases, as much information as possible about the text as could be gleaned from the field notes and student artifacts was input to the database, while "N/A" was input to any field for which precise documentation was impossible. To generate more information about the texts selected by students in this study, all text selections in the database were further analyzed recursively,

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salient and no texts remained unaccounted for by the set of categories that emerged, and

the key properties of these categories were then formalized as fields in the database. As a

result of this analysis, nine additional fields were created.

The first new field created was Context of Text Selection. Categories for context

of text selection were the following: Self-report Independent Reading, Self-report

Recreational, Self-report Interest, DEAR Shared, DEAR Solitary, Genre Project, Book

Project, Visualization Text, Book Fair/Bookstore and Multiple Contexts. This last

category was developed to account for the few cases of texts that students selected for

either the Genre or Book Projects that were also brought in for the culminating activity

on visualization skills.

The next field created was Medium. Categories in this field were the following:

Book, Magazine, Game, Movie/Video, TV Show, Short Story and Consumer Product. An

associated field was created to indicate whether or not the text was part of a series of

texts. This field contained just two categories – Series or Not Series – and was reserved

for texts with the Medium classifications of Book, Game, Movie/Video and Short Story,

because within these media, texts were selected that satisfied both categories. Because

they are periodical in nature, texts classified as Magazine and TV Show (at least all

particular texts selected by students in this study from these media) are inherently series,

and thus did not need to be distinguished from non-series texts with the same Medium

classification.

The next field created was Year of Publication/Production. For this field, the year

in which the text first appeared was documented for the media of Book, Movie/Video and

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Short Story. For the medium of Magazine, the current year was used, as all magazines that were documented among the text selections were current issues. For the medium of TV Show, the year in which the program first premiered on television was documented. For the medium of Consumer Product, N/A was documented in the database. For any text selections for which an exact year of publication or production was impossible to document due to incomplete information, N/A was input to the database in this field. Sources used to determine year of publication or production were the copyright pages of books when available, and Amazon.com, iBistro (Homestead Public School's online library catalog), and the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) for texts that were not physically available for inspection. Conflicts between sources were resolved by consulting additional information sources on the web, such as publishers' and authors' websites, other libraries' online catalogs, and Wikipedia.

Two fields were created to document readability levels of the texts. Readability levels were only sought for texts with the Medium classification of Book, as these texts are first and foremost print-based and all existing readability calculation methods can by their very nature only be run on print-based texts. Readability was not sought for texts classified as Magazine, despite the fact that they are print-based, because by their periodical nature, readability may vary both within and between issues. In this regard, books are in some sense more fixed in their readability than magazines or other periodical texts. Multiple readability scores were sought because individual calculation methods focus on different elements of language in a text, and having multiple scores can give a fuller appreciation of the linguistic complexity of a given text than any single score can give. Readability levels were first obtained using Amazon.com, which reports Fog and

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Flesch-Kincaid readability scores for many of its products. From those text selections for which Amazon.com did not report readability scores, 66 were selected to be calculated manually. To calculate readability levels using the Flesch-Kincaid formula, three 200-word samples from different parts of a text were selected. The average sentence length (L) was calculated for each sample by dividing the number of words in the sample (200) by the number of sentences in the sample. Where necessary, the number of sentences was estimated to the nearest tenth. The average number of syllables per word (N) was calculated for each sample by dividing the number of syllables in the sample by the number of words (200). The readability level for the sample (expressed in terms of grade level) was then calculated for each sample using the following formula: $(L \times 0.39) + (N \times 11.8) - 15.59$. The readability levels for the three samples were then averaged together to obtain the Flesch-Kincaid score for the whole text. To calculate readability levels using the Fog readability test, three 100-word samples from a text were selected. The average sentence length was calculated for each sample by dividing the number of words in the sample (100) by the number of sentences in the sample. Where necessary, the number of sentences was estimated to the nearest tenth. The average sentence length across samples (L) was then obtained by averaging together the figures obtained for each sample. Next, in each sample, the number of words with three or more syllables was counted, and these figures were averaged together to yield N. The readability level for the text (expressed in terms of grade level) was then calculated using the following formula: $(L + N) \times 0.4$. Mean readability levels of texts selected by boys and girls for vernacular and academic contexts on both readability measures were calculated, and t-tests were run to compare means.

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The final three fields that were created to code each text selection in the database were generated to capture different aspects of genre. The first of these fields documented the intended audience of the text. For texts with the Medium classification of Book, the following categories emerged for Genre-Audience: Young Adult and General Readers. For texts with the Medium classification of TV Show or Movie/Video, the following categories for Genre-Audience were used: G, PG, PG-13, R and General Viewers. The first four categories correspond to the movie ratings classification system of the Motion Picture Association of America, and texts categorized by Medium as Movie/Video were categorized by Genre-Audience in accordance with their MPAA ratings, when available.[3] The category of General Viewers was used for all Movie/Video texts that did not carry MPAA ratings (such as direct-to-video programs) as well as for all texts classified as TV Show. TV Show texts were assigned to this category rather than using the ratings classification system promoted by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences because TV ratings are assigned to individual episodes of television series based upon the content of particular programs, rather than assigning general ratings to whole series. Because the TV Show text selections documented in this study referred to favorite series watched by students, it was not possible to categorize TV Show selections by individual episode ratings. Finally, for text selections categorized by Medium as Game, the following categories for Genre-Audience were used: T-Teen, M-Mature, and E-Everyone. These ratings correspond to those assigned to video games by the ESRB. All games documented in this study were video games, and none of the video games documented among the text

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[3]While some readers may be concerned that any Movie/Video texts selected by sixth graders carried R ratings, it should be noted that no Movie/Video text selections made by students in this study carried the even more restrictive MPAA rating of NC-17.

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selections carried ratings of Y-Youth or A-Adult. Thus, those ratings were not included in the Genre-Audience categorization scheme.

The second field dedicated to Genre was used to indicate whether the text selection was fiction or non-fiction. The following categories for Genre-Fiction/NonFiction emerged: Fiction, Non-Fiction, Mixed and N/A. All texts classified by Medium as Book were categorized either as Fiction or Non-Fiction, all Movies/Videos were categorized as Fiction (no documentaries were selected by any students in this study) and all Games were categorized as N/A. TV Shows billing themselves as "reality programs" were categorized as Non-Fiction, while all others (except one) were categorized as Fiction. The sole exception was *WWE Smackdown!*, which was categorized as Mixed because it explicitly bills itself as "sports entertainment" rather than as sports programming, carving a middle ground between unscripted sports competition and scripted drama. Most Magazines were categorized as Non-Fiction, with the exception of those such as *American Girl* that regularly feature works of short fiction in addition to information articles. Such texts were categorized as Mixed.

The third and final field dedicated to Genre was used to capture the subject matter of the text selections. The following categories emerged in the analysis: Action, Automotive, Animals, Comic Book, Comedy, Fantasy, Gaming, Science Fiction, Historical Fiction, Biography, Mystery/Thriller, Realistic Fiction, Sports, Multiple Genres, Inspirational, Poetry, History, General Non-fiction, Reference, Popular Culture, and Reality/Simulation. Unlike the two previous sets of genre categories, categorizations by Genre-Subject Matter were not cleanly associated with particular Medium classifications.

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To summarize the coding procedures for text selections in this study, all text selections were initially documented in a database and categorized according to author, title and student number. Further iterative analysis of the text selections yielded a number of factors by which each text selection could be further categorized: Medium, Year of Publication/Production, Series/Not Series, Genre-Audience, Genre-Fiction/Non-fiction and Genre-Subject Matter. The Query and Report functions of Microsoft Access were used to generate a series of reports in which text selections were grouped by each of the fields used to categorize each item in the dataset, and these reports were analyzed recursively to discover patterns in the text selections made by the whole group of students, between subgroups of students (i.e., differences between boys' and girls' selections in different contexts), and within the sets of text selections made by individual students over the course of the school year in a process of cross case synthesis (Yin, 2002).

Interview transcripts, artifacts of student work and field notes were further analyzed using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) beyond their yielding of information to contribute to the text selection database. Emerging themes regarding the reasons why particular texts appealed to students and the functions of those texts within the students' academic and vernacular literacy lives were identified and categorized as these documents were analyzed recursively until no new themes became salient.

ERAS scores and achievement data were used to triangulate emerging themes from the qualitative analysis, to gauge students' attitudes, abilities and changes in both over time, and to group student data for qualitative analysis. Simple t-tests were run on

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the fall and spring ERAS data to determine the extent to which differences in reading attitude for recreational and academic purposes existed between boys and girls, between focal and non-focal students and between homerooms, as well as the extent to which reading attitudes differed between fall and spring administrations of the ERAS.

This case study used multiple, nested units of analyses. At the highest level, the set of text selections made by all students in Connors' language arts classes formed a unit, from which general patterns of students' reading selections over the course of a school year, and mean levels of reading ability and attitude could be determined. The next level of analysis was on the boys in Mr. Connors' classes, to determine the extent to which boys' literacy practices within the classroom differed from girls' as well as from general trends for the class as a whole. The text selections made by individual focal students constituted the next unit of analysis, to develop rich descriptions of individual literacy practices as exemplars of (or contrasts to) more general trends seen in the class. Finally, the smallest unit of analysis was the individual text selection.

Role of the Researcher

As discussed previously, my role in the classroom was primarily as an observer of classroom activities and interviewer of individual students pulled from the classroom context during the second and third trimesters of the 2004-2005 school year. I made only two presentations to Connors' classes over the course of the year. Early in the first trimester, I introduced the goals of my study and solicited volunteers to participate as focal students. Near the start of the third trimester, I donated three books by Eoin Colfer to the classroom library (*Artemis Fowl, Artemis Fowl and the Arctic Incident* and *The Supernaturalist*) and was asked by Connors to speak briefly about each of the books as a

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model for the kinds of book talks he wanted students to engage in. This author talk qualified me for an Extra Effort Award, a good citizenship honor system by which Connors and his students would recognize positive contributions made by students to the learning environment.

Beyond these two occasions, my interactions with students were limited almost entirely to scheduled, semi-structured interviews with focal students and occasional informal chats with individual focal students during free time or transitions between class sessions. During the library visitations to select texts for the Book Project, Connors encouraged students to solicit my opinion on particular titles they were considering; however, such consultation was limited to conversations with focal students and a couple of general suggestions in response to Connors' inquiries regarding ideas for titles on particular subjects (e.g., a good baseball book).

While I spoke individually with Connors during all of my visits to his classroom, at no time did I offer unsolicited commentary on classroom proceedings. My conversations with Connors were mainly of the informal interview variety, with me asking him questions about what would be occurring in class on a given day, how successfully he felt particular activities turned out, and how he saw his background as a reader influencing his beliefs about reading instruction. On a couple of occasions, Connors asked me to offer an opinion on ideas for classroom activities, but never did I actively engage with Connors in detailed conversations geared toward developing future lesson plans or classroom activities, nor did I ever attempt to persuade Connors toward or dissuade him from a particular course of action in his classroom.

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CHAPTER 4

Results

Introduction

This study was designed to investigate four research questions about the academic

and vernacular literacy practices of a class of middle school boys. Specifically, this study

sought to answer:

1. What are the vernacular literacy practices of a class of middle school boys and

   what kinds of texts do these boys engage with in those practices?

2. How and to what extent do these boys' vernacular literacies become visible

   within a language arts program structured around students' self-selected texts?

3. How and to what extent do the vernacular and academic literacy practices of

   these boys differ from those of the girls within the same class? and

4. What attitudes toward vernacular and academic literacy practices do these

   boys hold, how do they compare with the attitudes of other students, and how

   do those attitudes change over the course of an academic year in a book club

   based classroom?

Because literacy practices are not directly observable, but rather are implied from

literacy events, before directly answering these research questions it is necessary to

provide some definition of the literacy events upon which this study's results are based.

Over the course of the 2004-2005 school year, the 48 students in Mr. Connors' language

arts classes made a grand total of 672 documented text selections across academic and

vernacular literacy contexts, and as detailed in Chapter 3, each text selection was

analyzed through a number of lenses, including medium, genre and readability. A full list

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of texts for which complete author and title information was available that were selected

by students in this study is given in Appendix C. Table A3 summarizes the numbers of

text selections made by boys and girls for each of the academic and vernacular contexts

documented in this study. Totals for all academic contexts except Independent Reading

represent text selections made by all 48 of Connors' students, and as noted in Chapter 3,

these were documented through direct observation of classroom behaviors and analysis of

students' written work. Totals for all vernacular contexts as well as for Independent

Reading[4] represent text selections made by the 22 focal students who volunteered for a

series of one-on-one interviews, during which these selections were documented.

Question One

What are the vernacular literacy practices of a class of middle school boys and what

kinds of texts do these boys engage with in those practices?

The vernacular literacy practices in which the boys who participated in this study

engaged can best be described first by considering the particular texts that boys selected

for vernacular purposes and secondly by considering the social and psychological

contexts in which boys engaged with those texts.

Texts. In their vernacular literacy practices, there were few individual titles or

authors around which boys' text selections congregated very strongly. Four authors,

Jonathan Rand, Matt Christopher, Gordon Korman and Jude Watson, appear in the

dataset exclusively among boys' text selections. Of these four, only Rand and

Christopher were named as favorite authors exclusively by boys in follow-up interviews

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[4]Because Mr. Connors did not maintain a record of the titles read by students for Independent Reading
credit during the first trimester, text selections coded as Independent Reading are based entirely on self-
reporting from focal students during the first round of interviews. None of these text selections are
attributable to non-focal students.

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with focal students, and only Rand and Christopher's works appeared among the text selections of more than five boys. However, only Rand's books appear among the text selections made by boys for vernacular purposes in significant numbers; only one of the eleven text selections by Christopher was made for recreational reading purposes, compared with ten of the 33 Rand selections. The overall diversity of titles and authors in the entire dataset of text selections, regardless of gender or context, is one of the most striking findings of this study. As can be clearly seen in Table A4, which lists all of the texts that were selected by five or more students for any purpose over the course of the school year, and Table A5, which lists all of the authors whose works were selected five or more times, while a few titles and authors were represented multiple times in the text selections, no single title or author appeared in a majority of the students' text selections. While Lemony Snicket was represented in the dataset by 72 text selections, making him the most frequently selected author, his works appear among the text selections of only 20 students, less than half of the sample of 48 students. Jonathan Rand, the second most frequently selected author with 33 text selections, appears among the text selections of 15 students, although unlike Snicket, Rand's works were selected exclusively by boys. While this represents less than a third of the whole set of students, it does constitute a majority of the boys, indicating that Rand's popularity among boys was more widespread than any other author's popularity among the whole group. Furthermore, the majority of the text selections made from the top 15 most selected authors, with the exceptions of JK Rowling and Electronic Arts, were made for academic purposes, indicating that academic text selections were slightly more likely to congregate around a set of popular authors than were vernacular text selections. Looking at the dataset through the lens of which

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titles are most represented among students' text selections (Table A4) demonstrates an even more extreme level of diversity, as the most popular titles were selected by no more than seven students.

However, this diversity should not be mistaken for randomness, and in the relative popularity of the works of Jonathan Rand and Matt Christopher among boys' text selections, a number of clear trends in boys' vernacular literacy practices can be illustrated. For one, both are primarily authors of series fiction, Jonathan Rand for his *Michigan Chillers* and *American Chillers* series of supernatural thrillers, and Matt Christopher for his prolific output of sports fiction novels. While it might be argued that Christopher is not technically a writer of series fiction to the extent that his novels do not feature recurring characters or storylines that extend from book to book, he is nonetheless well known enough in the young adult sports fiction market that his name alone carries the same connotations as the name of a series. Students in this study looked for "Matt Christopher books" in their library visits in the same way that they looked for "Lemony Snicket books" or "*Chillers* books." The particular title that they ultimately sought was less important than the text's affiliation with other closely related texts. In the case of Matt Christopher's novels, the lack of an overarching series title, such as *Goosebumps* or *American Chillers* did not prevent students from regarding his individual books as elements of a larger corpus, effectively branding these books as a series under the banner of *Matt Christopher*.

A preference for serial works among boys' text selections extends beyond these two authors to become a defining characteristic of the boys' vernacular literacy practices. All of the authors named by boys in one-on-one interviews as their favorites are primarily

writers of series fiction, and nearly all of the authors listed on Table A5 are represented in the database of text selections for their serial works, rather than for their stand-alone creations. In the overall set of 672 documented text selections, 391 (or approximately 58%) were coded as being part of a series, and all of the texts listed on Table A4 are serial publications.[5] Among the 160 text selections made by boys for vernacular purposes, 102 (or nearly 64%) were serial in nature, and boys' preference for series texts cut across all media documented in this study to include movie, television and video game series in addition to books. While fiction outnumbered non-fiction in the database of text selections by a factor of 3 to 1, a preference for series works was also prevalent in the non-fiction text selections made by boys for vernacular purposes, manifest in such series as the *Eyewitness* and *Dorling-Kindersley* information books, *The Encyclopedia of Danger*, and even "reality television" series such as *American Chopper* and *The Apprentice*.

The works of Jonathan Rand and Matt Christopher continue to serve as useful lenses for understanding the vernacular literacy practices of the boys in this study when we consider additional trends in boys' text selections such as audience and genre. Both Rand and Christopher write exclusively for children and young adult readers, and the vast majority of text selections made by students in this study across all media and across all contexts were created and marketed specifically for young adults and teens, with

[5] The only possible exception to this claim among the texts listed in Table A4 is *The Hobbit*, as it was originally written by JRR Tolkien as a stand-alone volume that would serve as a prequel to his previously published epic, *The Lord of the Rings*, but it has since come to be regarded by many readers – including this author – as an introductory text more appropriately read prior to the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* than afterward. This was also how focal students interviewed in this study regarded *The Hobbit*, more like the first volume of a tetraology than like a separate volume to be read after working through the original trilogy. Nonetheless, wherever one regards the proper place of *The Hobbit* within Tolkien's Middle Earth writings, there is no argument that it belongs within the corpus of said writings, and the centrality of the events, characters and setting of *The Hobbit* within the larger story of Middle Earth demonstrates that the novel is rightfully regarded as an exemplar of series fiction.

comparatively few selections made from texts intended for older audiences. Of the 648

text selections that were classifiable by Audience, 527 (over 78% of the total set of text

selections) were coded as YA, or Young Adult, while another 64 text selections were

coded as General Readers. None were written for an exclusively adult audience.

Movies/Videos were categorized using the MPAA rating system, which yielded 11 PG-

rated Movies/Videos, 12 rated PG-13, and 3 straight-to-video DVDs that did not carry

official MPAA ratings but were marketed for General Viewers. Games were categorized

using the ESRB rating system, which yielded 11 Games rated T-Teen, 7 rated E-

Everyone, 2 rated M-Mature, and one (*RuneQuest*) for which an official rating was

unavailable as it was developed prior to the advent of the ESRB rating system. As

discussed in the previous chapter, all TV Shows were coded by Genre-Audience as

General Viewers. While these numbers represent the distribution of texts by intended

audience for the whole dataset, young adult oriented texts carry as high a profile among

the texts selected by boys for vernacular purposes as they do among the texts selected by

the whole group.

This finding is supported by the lists of most popular books and authors given in

Tables A4 and A5. Only one item on Table A4 – *Sports Illustrated* – was not published

explicitly with the young adult market in mind, although it is by no means an

inappropriate text for this age group. Similarly, among the authors and publishers listed

on Table A5, only Time Inc. (publisher of *Sports Illustrated*) and Electronic Arts

(producer of video games) produced texts that were selected by students in this study that

fell outside of the young adult niche market, yet the texts they produced were created for

mass appeal to include that market as well as older consumers. For example, all of the

Electronic Arts games selected by students in this study were rated either T-Teen or E-Everyone.

This finding is further corroborated by analyzing the readability levels of boys' text selections for vernacular purposes, where such data was available. Both Fog and Flesch-Kincaid readability scores were obtained for 60 text selections (all Books), while only Flesch-Kincaid scores were obtained for an additional 20 selections (again, all Books). The mean Fog readability level was 8.29 grade equivalents, with a range of 4 to 14.8, and a standard deviation of 1.98. The mean Flesch-Kincaid readability level was 6.11 grade equivalents, with a range of 2.9 to 12.9, and a standard deviation of 1.78. This discrepancy between readability levels as measured by different methods is to be expected because, as described in the previous chapter, each method focuses on a different aspect of a given text's linguistic complexity. When considered together however, these figures indicate that the readability of the average text selection made by boys for vernacular purposes was closely equivalent to, if not considerably higher than, the students' grade level.

In terms of genre, boys expressed a strong preference in their vernacular literacy practices for works of imaginative fiction (an umbrella genre category that includes fantasy, science fiction and horror) and sports-themed fiction and non-fiction, the two genre categories with which the works of Jonathan Rand and Matt Christopher (respectively) are most closely identified. This is clearly demonstrated on Table A6, which presents the distribution of text selections made by focal students (the only students from whom text selections for vernacular purposes were documented) by gender, genre and academic or vernacular context. The first column on this table presents the

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generic distribution of boys' text selections for vernacular purposes, demonstrating a strong preference for fantasy above all other categories, followed by a cluster of five genres (action, mystery/thriller, realistic fiction, science fiction and sports) with nearly equal representation. Grouping together the genres of mystery/thriller, fantasy and science fiction under the heading of imaginative fiction captures all of the most popular series from which boys selected texts for vernacular purposes, including Rand's *Michigan* and *American Chillers*, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, RL Stine's *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street*, and a host of *Star Wars*-themed texts. Sports-themed texts, on the other hand, are not exclusively fiction. Not only does this category include a Matt Christopher novel, it also includes magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* and *Slam*, biographies of famous athletes, sports record books, sports video games, and video game reference guides. Further, the high profile of imaginative fiction and sports-themed texts among boys' text selections for vernacular purposes is not due to the overrepresentation of a few focal boys' voracious text consumption; rather, examples of both kinds of texts are spread throughout the vernacular text selections of nearly all of the focal boys.

Finally, boys' vernacular practices were generally marked by texts of quite recent vintage, and the works of Jonathan Rand and Matt Christopher represent convenient points on a continuum of text age that bracket nearly all of the texts selected by boys for vernacular purposes. The range of ages for texts selected by boys for vernacular purposes was 0 (indicating the text was published in 2005) to 68 years. The median age of a text selection was 5 years, and all of the Jonathan Rand titles that appear among boys' text selections were published within five years of the period in which data was gathered. On

the other side of the median, text ages are more sparsely distributed between 6 and 68 years old (Tolkein's *The Hobbit* being the oldest outlier), with a cluster of texts written between the late-1960s and mid-1980s, a span of years that coincides with Matt Christopher's most productive period. Figure B11 displays a frequency distribution graph of the number of text selections by age of text for all the text selections documented in this study across academic and vernacular purposes. Comparable to the subset of text selections made by boys for vernacular purposes, the mean age of a text selection in the whole dataset was 10.8 years, while the median was 5 years, the mode was 4 years, and the standard deviation was just under 15 years. As can be seen from a Figure B11, the distribution of text ages is extremely positively skewed, indicating a strong overall preference for texts published within the past five to ten years.

Thus, the works of Jonathan Rand and Matt Christopher provide convenient rallying points for summarizing the findings with regard to the texts that comprise the physical landscape of the vernacular literacy practices of the boys who participated in this study. In their vernacular literacy lives, these boys gravitated toward works of imaginative fiction and sports-themed texts, in particular selecting materials created for and marketed toward a young adult audience. In general, the boys selected texts with reading levels closely approximating their grade level, and often slightly higher, and they were more apt to select texts written within the past half decade (with a few notable exceptions for 20th century classics). Lastly, the boys preferred texts that were part of a series, whether the series involved books, movies, video games or, as will be demonstrated in the next section, a combination of multiple media.

Contexts. More critical to understanding boys' vernacular literacy practices than

the particular texts with which boys engaged are the ways in which boys went about reading those texts, the stances they adopted toward them and the contexts within which their engagement with those texts occurred. Few individual texts were inherently interesting in and of themselves, and boys did not "just read," selecting single texts one at a time and reading them in isolation. More compelling to the boys in this study were the connections that they could draw between diverse constellations of texts. As noted above, the boys were particularly drawn to serial works, but those serial interests were not constrained by medium. The boys displayed the strongest interest in books, magazines, movies, DVDs and games that could be connected not just to other texts, but to other texts from different media. They not only took great pleasure in following characters, plots and entire narrative worlds across multiple media outlets and delivery systems, their interactions with these multimedia textual constellations formed important building blocks of boys' personal and social identity.

More than intertextual, the vernacular literacy practices engaged in by the boys in this study can best be characterized as transmedial (Semali, 2002; Semali & Fueyo, 2001). When readers make intertextual connections between books, magazines, films, TV shows and other media texts, they typically note similarities and differences between characters, themes and plot points shared by two or more texts. In other words, they recognize points of comparison and contrast between texts. What transmediation represents, as distinct from an exercise in recognizing intertextual connections, is a synthesis of a new understanding – or "poem," to borrow a term from Rosenblatt (1978) – that is not confined to a reader's interaction with a single text. A transmedial understanding is a bricolage of ideas drawn from a set of narrative and informational

texts. Transmediating readers (or consumers, to better capture the breadth of print and non-print texts with which boys in this study engaged) adopt a stance toward texts that is neither exclusively aesthetic, imaginatively entering into and experiencing narrative worlds, nor exclusively efferent, extracting discrete bits of information from expository text. Rather, such readers iterate along a continuum between these stances, synthesizing the experiences of entering the visualized narrative worlds of some texts and digesting information gleaned from other texts to create an engaging personal, multitextual (and multimodal) diegesis. The ways in which Gatorade and Link, two focal boys who described themselves as "major *Star Wars* fans," oriented themselves toward the texts that they consumed for vernacular purposes are illustrative of the transmedial literacy practices demonstrated by many of the boys in this study.

For Gatorade and Link, the climax of the 2004-2005 school year came in mid-May with the theatrical release of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. In the months leading up to the film's premiere, Gatorade and Link read books from the *Jedi Apprentice* and *Boba Fett* series that extend upon narrative threads suggested in the first two films of the trilogy, played the PlayStation 2 game *Star Wars: Battlefront*, which allows players to fight through battles both depicted and merely referred to in the *Star Wars* films, and watched *Clone Wars* on DVD, an animated series that covers events leading directly into the opening action of *Episode III*. While each of these works could stand alone as a unique narrative experience, when taken together, these texts create a comprehensive portrait of the *Star Wars* universe that no single text provides on its own. Furthermore, while all of these texts derive from common source material, no two of these *Star Wars*-themed texts are straightforward adaptations of each other in the way

that a typical movie novelization is a transposition of a film's screenplay into prose. What Gatorade and Link understand about the *Star Wars* universe is a synthesis of narrative information gleaned from a constellation of texts spanning multiple media, with each text contributing uniquely to their *Star Wars* knowledge base and worldview rather than recapitulating diegetic material consumed elsewhere.

Even in the case of adaptations, the current fashion in transmedia storytelling is that each media incarnation of a core storyline offer a unique narrative experience, with various elements of plot and character development distributed exclusively among particular versions of the story such that a full understanding of the diegesis resides in a synthesis of transmedia narrative experiences (Jenkins, 2006). Link played the *Episode III* videogame to its conclusion and read two different *Episode III* novelizations a week before the film's release. While the game, novel and film share a core narrative arc and cast of characters, each contains certain plot points, action sequences and details on character relationships that the other versions do not offer, and as Jenkins (2006) notes in his analysis of *The Matrix*, these distinctions are not merely artifacts of the affordances and limitations of the particular media mustered into service in the transmedia enterprise, but reflect deliberate creative decisions on the part of the producers. While "each medium does what it does best," a successful transmedia franchise survives by "pitching the content somewhat differently in the different media" such that "each work offers fresh experiences" (p. 148). Redundancy derails the transmedia experience, as both the broad and nuanced distinctions between transmedia texts become the substance of natural conversations. As Link engaged with each successive incarnation of the *Episode III* story, he would take advantage of transition points in the school day to breathlessly report

points of comparison and contrast between the texts to me (a confessed *Star Wars* fanatic and fellow consumer of these same texts), as well as offer his opinion on how certain aspects of the game or book should have been included in the movie and vice versa.

Further examples of transmediation abound in the vernacular literacy practices of the boys in this study. After watching nightly episodes of *The Simpsons* with his father, B-Rad would often play a few missions in *Simpsons Hit 'n Run* on the PlayStation, extending his enjoyment of the characters' antics from a primarily receptive medium (television) to an interactive one (video gaming). Axel read the *Amazing Spiderman* comic book each month, then followed Spiderman's adventures through the first two motion pictures directed by Sam Raimi, which are not wholesale adaptations of material from the comic books, but rather fresh takes on the Spiderman mythos that frequently play upon viewers' familiarity with a large canon of pop cultural texts. Axel enjoyed each individual text in this converging array of media texts on its own terms, but making a commitment to follow the series within and across multiple media platforms provided Axel with an engaging narrative experience that no single text or medium could provide.

One might be tempted to argue that what I am labeling transmediation here is less an authentic literacy practice than it is a case of adolescents performing a role of good consumer, at least from the perspective of the corporate producers of such media texts. Indeed, the stereotypes of the mindless consumer and the obsessed fan often merge in the popular imagination, especially in the case of fans of science fiction franchises (Jenkins, 1992). As fashion-conscious teenagers spend large amounts of money to pursue "a look" that is often more about displaying particular brand names than about comfort or practicality (Quart, 2004), science fiction and fantasy fans are often stereotyped as

uncritically omnivorous consumers of texts that bear the imprimatur of their favorite

narrative franchises, no matter how well or poorly crafted those texts may be (Alvermann

& Hagood, 2000; Jenkins, 1992).

However, such an interpretation denies a high degree of agency that readers,

viewers and game players regularly bring to their text selections within such transmedial

enterprises, an agency that was indeed seen among the boys in this study. While both

Link and Gatorade were avid fans of *Star Wars*, neither was an uncritical consumer of all

things *Star Wars*, nor was each boy's constellation of transmedial text selections within

the *Star Wars* realm identical. Link noted that while he enjoyed the games and the

movies, the novels were his favorite medium, as he preferred "to make pictures in my

head." Link even pursued his *Star Wars* interests into non-fiction reading, selecting a

George Lucas biography for the Genre Project, which he noted he would have gladly read

"for fun" without the assignment. Gatorade, on the other hand, liked the novels the least,

not because he disliked reading, but because in the books, "there's not as much light

saber fighting," a key feature in his favorite *Star Wars* movies and games. Each boy thus

carved out his own unique textual niche within the larger *Star Wars* mediascape (King &

O'Brien, 2002), and while Link and Gatorade's patterns of text selections were no doubt

shared with millions of other young adolescent (and adult) *Star Wars* fans, it is important

to note that each boy felt his fandom as an "individual, or special taste," an "experience

of identity" (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, pp 444-445; also, Alvermann, Huddleston &

Hagood, 2004). That is, no matter how widely their interests in *Star Wars* were shared by

other people, both Link and Gatorade referenced *Star Wars* texts as unique markers of

their identity, not simply as texts they read, watched or played with, but rather as part of

who they are.

Further evidence against the premise that these students' transmedial allegiances were more artifacts of orchestrated corporate media campaigns than cases of authentic literacy practices comes from students' relatively narrow allegiances within the *Series of Unfortunate Events* franchise, indicating that not all transmedia enterprises are created (or received) equally. While Lemony Snicket's novels were popular with many boys and girls in Connors' classroom, the much-publicized movie version, starring Jim Carrey, was not. On a number of occasions during his read-alouds of *The Bad Beginning*, the first book in the series, Connors talked up the movie, which was released along with tie-in video games, fast food promotions and new book publications during the winter holiday break of the 2004-05 school year. However, among Connors' students, there was no buzz about the movie once it was released, no discussion (formal or informal) that would indicate that anyone had even seen the movie, tried the videogame or otherwise consumed any tie-in product other than the original novels. Given that the movie grossed over $30 million its opening weekend, and would ultimately gross close to $120 million domestically, it is likely that at least a few of Connors' students saw it in the theater during its original release, but while the books continued to be popular selections throughout the remainder of the school year, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as an exercise in transmedia narrative did not capture these students' imaginations. In his Book Project presentation on *The Hostile Hospital* (the eighth book in the series), Gatorade articulated a strong personal connection to Klaus, one of the series' protagonists: "Klaus loves to read books and everything he reads he remembers. Klaus is like me because sometimes I get into a series of books and I remember what it's about like Klaus, when

he remembers what's in the books he reads ... once I started reading it, I couldn't stop."

However, in an informal conversation after the study concluded, Gatorade admitted that

while he had seen the film, he did not enjoy it very much, primarily because he did not

feel the same personal connection with the cinematic depiction of Klaus as he did with

his literary incarnation and because he felt the filmmakers took too many liberties with

the books' storyline in their attempt to make a single movie that covered the material of

the first three books. In contrast to his transmedial experience with *Star Wars*, Gatorade

preferred Lemony Snicket's books over their movie adaptations, indicating at the very

least a nascent critical perspective on his transmedial consumption, which provides some

evidence against the argument that transmediation is simply a capitulation of "authentic"

personal taste to a corporate-driven consumerist imperative. This is not to argue naively

that adolescents' tastes are immune to advertising and media hype; Gatorade, and

thousands (if not millions) of adolescents did go see the film, after all. The point I wish to

reinforce here is that through the transmedial text selections that many adolescents (in

this study, almost exclusively boys) make in their vernacular literacy practices,

adolescents experience and express a sense of personal identity, and that while that

experience might be generally shared with masses of other adolescents, individuals act as

agents of their own textual identity construction, purposefully aligning with particular

texts and rejecting others within particular mediascapes.

Given the overwhelming popularity of imaginative fiction among the focal boys'

text selections for vernacular purposes, it should not be surprising that the richest

examples of these boys' transmedial allegiances come from this realm. However, the role

of transmediation at the intersection of these boys' vernacular literacy practices and

social identity construction is most clearly seen among the boys in this study in a different mediascape: sports. For as much as Link and Gatorade situated their identities as readers in their consumption of imaginative fiction texts, these interests remained largely isolated to individual transmediation. A number of other boys, focal and non-focal, were documented in literacy events with *Star Wars* texts, but on only one occasion was any sharing of these interests observed between boys.[6] Indeed, during one DEAR session two non-focal boys sitting near each other were observed reading multiple books from the *Jedi Apprentice* series, yet at no point before, during or after the DEAR time did either boy acknowledge the other's similar reading habits, and when not being read for DEAR, the books were kept hidden from view, zipped up in their respective binders. Whether any of the non-focal boys aligned their textual identities with *Star Wars* to the extent that Link and Gatorade did, as well as whether any sharing of these interests took place in non-academic contexts, is unknown, but the fact remains that within the academic contexts documented in this study, transmediation in the *Star Wars* universe was visible almost exclusively as a private literacy practice.

This is not the case with boys' consumption of sports-related texts, particularly those dealing with basketball. Montel and Tiger, both focal boys, engaged with a variety of basketball-themed print and non-print texts across vernacular and academic literacy contexts. Moreover, these literacy events were frequently shared experiences, as Montel and Tiger would together pore over an issue of *Slam!* magazine, an informational book on the history of the Philadelphia '76ers, or Michael Jordan's autobiography *For the Love*

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[6]The day after the theatrical release of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, the following exchange was documented in the field notes: Connors asks the class if anyone has seen *Star Wars*. Non-focal boy: "Yeah, *Star Wars* was stupid." Link throws down reading, "What!? People who say *Star Wars* is stupid are stupid!"

of the Game during DEAR time. On multiple occasions, other boys would join them for sometimes brief, sometimes extended periods. During the Genre Project, biographies about sports stars, including Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson, were circulated among multiple boys, and during the culminating activity on visualization skills, some boys brought multiple sports texts to share with other boys who had forgotten to bring their own sports texts from home. When Connors' students made a class trip to the library to select books for the Book Project, some boys (such as PB, Gatorade and Chipmunk) selected works of imaginative fiction, which they either immediately began reading by themselves in a quiet part of the library or set aside to read later, using the remainder of the library time to chat with friends. Tiger, Montel, Axel, B-Rad and two non-focal boys, on the other hand, all selected Matt Christopher sports fiction novels, then sat together at a table and passed the books around, commenting on which ones they preferred to read for the project. During the oral presentations of Book Project posters, Connors allowed time after each student's presentation for discussion, time that was usually taken up by brief comments (e.g., "Good") or stock questions (e.g., "Did you like it?") from students, or brief discourses on the selected books by Connors himself (e.g., after a presentation on Walter Dean Myers' *Scorpions*, Connors offered recommendations for other novels by Myers). However, after presentations on works of sports fiction, student-generated discussion (led by boys) was much more animated, with references to shared athletic experiences that connected with the book being discussed. For example, after Montel's presentation on *Johnny Long Legs*, a Matt Christopher novel in which the protagonist carries the eponymous nickname, multiple boys recalled similar nicknames given to Montel, an unusually tall and slender boy, by his teammates. After a non-focal student's

presentation on a football-themed novel, a number of boys made lighthearted comments about the on-field performance of the presenter during the previous football season, in contrast to the heroics ascribed to the novel's protagonist.

These observations illustrate ways in which literacy events with particular sports texts constituted social practices among the boys in Connors' classroom, but the mediascape in which those practices were situated encompassed a much broader array of text forms than these print media examples. The dataset on which this study is based almost certainly underrepresents the number of non-print texts with which focal students engaged in their vernacular literacy practices. This is especially true in the realm of sports, where live and broadcast sporting events were excluded from analysis as were televised sports information programs such as *ESPN SportsCenter*. Field notes document several informal conversations between boys about professional sports games, especially during the NCAA and NBA basketball tournaments (which took place during the final trimester of the school year), clearly indicating that boys not only engaged with more non-print sports texts than the dataset would indicate, but that these texts also played a central role in forging and maintaining boys' social identities. Despite the exclusion of an incalculable number of such texts, several non-print sports texts did nevertheless make it into the dataset, including DVDs (e.g., *Friday Night Lights, Remember the Titans, Rocky*) and videogames (e.g., *NBA Street 3, ESPN 2K5*) either brought to class for the culminating activity on visualization skills or self-reported by focal students as part of their recreational media consumption.

Expanding the definition of media text even further to embrace all of the "extensions of man" (McLuhan, 1966) by which students conveyed information about

their professional and collegiate team allegiances, boys in particular were likely not only to wear clothing bearing the colors and logos of both of Michigan's Big 10 schools, but also to comment on each other's fashion choices in this regard, especially when pairs of students would wear the apparel of rival teams. Also popular among the boys in Connors' classroom were "baller bands," rubber wristbands bearing inspirational messages and/or team colors and logos. Boys would wear these bands prominently, collect them, swap them and frequently share stories about where new and unique bands could be purchased. While some boys, particularly Link, would also express interests in the *Star Wars* and Nintendo mediascapes through t-shirts and other apparel, these fashion choices did not inspire conversation among boys in the way that sports-themed apparel did.

What these boys' use of a broad range of sports-themed texts illustrates is a strong nexus of literacy practices and identity construction. Crawford (2004) notes that "material objects need to be understood as social agents" (p. 120), and it is through this semiotic process of "performative consumption" that individuals appropriate, interpret and manipulate a variety of verbal and non-verbal sign systems to align their social identities with those of groups or other individuals with whom they would like to be affiliated. Gee (2005) labels mediascapes that afford such purposes "affinity spaces" (p. 214), multitextual (and multimodal) environments through which individuals forge social alliances based on common interests and a shared grammar of signs, symbols and Discourses. Fan communities that build up around such transmedial enterprises as *Star Wars,* Japanese anime and manga, ABC's *Lost* and the Harry Potter novels and films are all prototypical examples of affinity spaces (see Carey, 2005; Jenkins, 1992, 2006), but so too are those that arise around sports leagues like the NBA and particular teams like

the Boston Red Sox (see O'Nan & King, 2005). Fine (1987) notes that for middle school age children, a key "imperative of development" (p. 105) is the growth and expansion of social competence across multiple social worlds, which is essential to achieving a sense of industry, the critical psychosocial milestone for young adolescents according to Erikson. Fine concludes from his ethnography of boys' Little League teams that sports participation at this age serves as a convenient (although not always positive) crucible for such peer alignment and socialization, an idea echoed widely in the popular literature on boys' and young men's athletics (Griffin, 1998; Messner, 1992; Whitson, 1990). Less discussed in the literature is how sports fandom – or in Gee's terms, participation within a sports-based affinity space – at this age might serve similar purposes. One conclusion that might be drawn from this study is that it may very well, as the most socially vibrant literacy events in which some focal boys engaged revolved around transmediation in a sports mediascape. It should be noted that sports mediascapes did not constitute the only affinity spaces in which boys engaged in identity construction through transmediation, as the examples of Link and Gatorade with their *Star Wars* passions illustrate. However, the affinity spaces that arose around basketball and other sports were the most socially active ones to become visible within Connors' permeable classroom.

Question Two

How and to what extent do these boys' vernacular literacies become visible within a language arts program structured around students' self-selected texts?

The second research question was included to assess whether the preferences expressed among students' text selections across the contexts documented in this study authentically reflect their abiding personal interests. That is, when given the opportunity

to select personally interesting reading materials for academic literacy tasks, do students

bring texts that indeed reflect their personal interests or do they in some sense "play

school," making text selections and engaging in literacy practices that conform to prior

expectations for what counts as appropriate reading for school or that achieve some other

aim apart from exploring personal interests? As the discussion on the previous question

suggests, many aspects of the boys' vernacular literacy practices did become visible in Ed

Connors' language arts program. While many of the interactions over sports-themed texts

described above were documented during transition periods in the school day, and thus

outside of the curricular space managed by Connors, text selections that boys made for

various Language Arts activities nonetheless did resemble the kinds of text selections that

boys made for recreational literacy pursuits. As with the first question, comparisons

between the boys' vernacular and academic literacy practices can be usefully made by

considering both the kinds of texts that boys selected for academic literacy tasks and the

extent to which the permeable curriculum set up by Connors afforded the social and

psychological contexts that defined boys' engagement with those texts in their vernacular

literacy lives.

Texts. In terms of genre, boys in this study did for the most part take advantage of

Connors' permeable classroom structure to make visible the texts that constitute the

physical landscape of their vernacular literacy practices. As the first two columns of

Table A6 demonstrate, while boys selected texts from a wider range of genres for

vernacular purposes than for academic purposes, the most popular genres among the text

selections made for vernacular purposes closely correspond to the most popular genres

among text selections made for academic purposes. Fantasy and the other imaginative

fiction genres were popular in both academic and vernacular text selections, as were

sports themed texts (some of which are included under the realistic fiction heading).

There are three notable exceptions to this general conclusion: biographies and

historical fiction were represented more strongly among boys' text selections for

academic purposes relative to those made for vernacular purposes; the action genre was

totally absent among boys' text selections for academic purposes; and fantasy had a

considerably stronger presence among boys' vernacular text selections. The first

exception is attributable to the fact that biographies and historical fiction were two of the

five genres in the Genre Project. We would expect boys to make selections from these

genres for academic purposes because they were assigned to do so. Had these genres not

been included in the Genre Project, we might expect that biographies and historical

fiction would appear in lower numbers, comparable to their presence among boys' text

selections for vernacular purposes. The second exception is attributable to the fact that all

of the text selections from the action genre were movies or DVDs, a medium with

extremely limited representation among text selections for academic purposes. The only

occasion on which boys brought DVDs to school for academic literacy tasks was during

the culminating activity on visualization skills, for which Connors explicitly encouraged

students to bring in "something that you enjoy reading ... that you can make a picture in

your head as you read." No additional restrictions were put on the kind of text that

students could bring in; indeed, when a student asked if a shampoo bottle would be

appropriate, Connors said it would be fine, provided it contained text with enough

"picture words" to conjure a vivid image in the student's mind as she read. Nevertheless,

only two boys brought in favorite DVDs for that activity, and action movies constitute

the rare text genre that remained an exclusive feature of boys' vernacular literacy lives. The third exception is partially attributable to the fact that the number of fantasy titles among boys' text selections for vernacular purposes is inflated by certain focal boys' heavy self-reporting of fantasy books among their extracurricular reading. Despite this, works of fantasy (and imaginative fiction in general) did nevertheless appear in appreciable numbers in the academic and vernacular text selections of all of the focal boys whose text selections are represented on this chart. The finding that the most frequently selected genre for boys' academic text selections is represented even more strongly among boys' vernacular text selections should not affect the above interpretation, but rather reinforce the conclusion that the chief difference between boys' text selections for vernacular and academic purposes in terms of genre is more quantitative (i.e. more texts from more genres) than qualitative.

A more substantial divergence between the text selections made for academic and vernacular purposes by the boys in this study is in the realm of readability. Although boys' text selections across contexts were overwhelmingly aimed at young adult audiences, boys' text selections for academic purposes scored significantly lower on scales of readability than did their text selections for vernacular purposes. Tables A7 and A8 display t-test comparisons between the mean readability levels of focal boys' and girls' text selections for different purposes, using Fog and Flesch-Kincaid readability measures, respectively. On both scales, boys' vernacular text selections scored more than one full grade level equivalent higher than those made for academic purposes, suggesting that boys selected more linguistically challenging texts for their vernacular literacy practices than for academic reading. This suggests that while boys were selecting texts

for school reading activities that corresponded with their personal interests in terms of subject matter, the boys were nonetheless opting to read easier texts for school than they might select for leisure reading. One could interpret this as the boys playing the "game of school" (Fried, 2005), choosing to minimize the effort put into academic tasks in order to get by without appearing to be an overachiever or a "loser," while saving more challenging texts for engagement at their own pace, on their own leisure time. There is some evidence to support such a conclusion. Tiger, whose previous year's Gates-MacGinitie score was among the highest of Connors' students, indicating a twelfth grade equivalency, opted to read a Matt Christopher novel with a fifth grade readability level for the Book Project. Axel, reading at a seventh grade equivalent, did the same, as did every boy reading at or above grade level who selected a Jonathan Rand title for the Book or Genre Project (the average readability for books in Rand's series is between third and fourth grade equivalent). However, the lower readability levels of texts selected for academic contexts does not negate the fact that these books frequently did have strong connections to the students' personal interests. The Book Project selection made by Tiger, an avid basketball fan and player, was a basketball themed Matt Christopher novel, and Axel, an avid football fan and player, selected for his Book Project a football themed Matt Christopher novel. While Jonathan Rand's books were popular among boys for Book and Genre Project selections, they were equally popular among boys' vernacular text selections. Thus, despite this difference between contexts in text selections' readability levels, it could be concluded that the high visibility within academic contexts of the most popular genres of reading material from boys' vernacular literacy practices is a good indication that boys' reading choices in Connors' class were reflective of

authentic personal interests.

In terms of medium, boys' text selections for vernacular purposes came from a wider range of media than did their selections for academic purposes. This should not be a surprising finding, considering the fact that in three of the five academic contexts in which participants' text selections were documented, students did not have the option to select texts other than books (see Chapter Three). While Connors did allow students to self-select personally interesting reading materials for Independent Reading and the Book and Genre Projects, students nevertheless had to choose books. While no such parameters were established for DEAR time, and students were explicitly encouraged to bring in non-book texts for culminating activity on visualization skills, few boys took advantage of that openness to explore non-book media in their academic reading choices. This can be clearly seen in Table A9, which presents the distribution by gender, medium and academic/vernacular context of all of the text selections made by focal students in this study. The only non-book medium that appeared among focal boys' text selections for academic contexts in any appreciable number was magazines.

Thus, while print media elements of boys' vernacular transmedial interests were well represented across academic contexts, the curriculum was less amenable to non-print texts. As permeable as Connor made his curriculum to afford the appearance of texts from many boys' most cherished vernacular literacy practices, such as Link and Gatorade's *Star Wars* interests or Tiger and Montel's basketball interests, those transmedial allegiances manifested themselves in academic contexts entirely as print media texts. While each of these boys participated in their respective affinity spaces through engagement with a wide range of non-print texts, such texts remained

exclusively a part of the boys' extracurricular literacy lives. This certainly reflects a structural limitation on the classroom's permeability; as discussed in Chapter Three, neither the Book Project nor the Genre Project made allowances for non-book texts, let alone non-print ones. It may also reflect a sense on the part of students that such texts were not welcome within academic contexts, despite Connors' encouragement of multimodal texts during the culminating activity on visualization skills, which is where the majority of the non-print and non-book texts that became visible in Connors' classroom made their appearance. For DEAR time, Connors did not dissuade students from reading non-print or non-book texts, but he did not actively encourage such reading either. The almost total invisibility of any such texts during DEAR time among both boys and girls suggests that despite Connors' creation of a permeable classroom structure, students' sense of appropriate DEAR reading may have been conditioned by prior book-centric language arts experiences, a notion that Connors' approach did not disrupt. The key here is not so much that multimodal or non-book texts were allowed to become visible, but that their visibility went largely unrecognized and unremarked upon by Connors over the course of the school year. As permeable as Connors attempted to make his curriculum to the vernacular literacy practices of his students, that curriculum remained a solidly print-centric literacy environment, even in the face of evidence that other semiotic systems were implicated in the most engaging of students' (particularly boys') vernacular literacy practices.

Contexts. The relative invisibility of non-print and non-book texts within the text selections that boys made for academic purposes necessarily limits the extent to which transmediation, a hallmark of the boys' vernacular literacy practices, could become

visible in Connors' classroom. Nevertheless, Connors did include two activities over the course of the year that had potential to capitalize on boys' ability to negotiate narrative meaning across media and semiotic systems. In one activity, Connors read aloud Rudyard Kipling's "Rikki Tikki Tavi," then asked students to identify the main and supporting details of the story. He then showed the Chuck Jones animated movie version of "Rikki Tikki Tavi." Discussion after the film focused on the extent to which the film covered the main and supporting details of the original. In the other activity, Connors read aloud a chapter from *Maniac Magee* that contained a good deal of physical action. Students were then challenged, in groups, to create a storyboard of the main events of the chapter and act them out. Subsequent discussion focused on the extent to which students were able to identify the key events of the chapter and visualize them to make sense of the narrative.

In both of these activities, Connors focused on core skills that he had stressed throughout the year: the ability to identify main and supporting details in a text and the ability to visualize story information from the printed word. The Book Project was set up to be a culmination of this skill building, as two of the tasks students had to complete in their poster presentations were to summarize the main events of the story and sketch out two moments from the book (see Figure B9). Both activities involved a certain degree of intertextuality; in the first, students made comparisons and contrasts between story and film versions of "Rikki Tikki Tavi," and in the second, students compared perfomative texts that they had created with the original version.

This attention to intertextual connections is as close as any activity in Connors' curriculum came to engaging students in transmediation. However, neither activity involved true transmediation in the sense that students were not challenged to synthesize

new understandings of the characters or narrative worlds from the available texts.

Further, none of the activities that incorporated students' self-selected texts afforded transmedial readings. Whether the projects involved book reports, poster presentations, keeping a log of pages read, or generating lists of "picture words" and sketching out key moments, students were encouraged to focus on one book or text at a time. While Connors did spend some time talking with students about how good readers make inferences, raising their metacognitive awareness about how writers can imply ideas without directly stating them, these discussions dealt solely with how good readers synthesize information within individual texts, not across multiple texts as takes place in transmediation. Aside from the two activities described above, Connors did not encourage students to make intertextual connections with any of their readings, self-selected or teacher-selected, preferring instead to build students' skills in making text-to-self connections (see Figures B7, B8 and B9 for examples of this emphasis).

Focusing on text-to-self connections is not bad practice. It is, after all, one of the core "strategies that work" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) promoted by literacy researchers as a hallmark of what good readers do, and can play an important role in supporting young adult's identity formation. However, giving official curricular recognition only to the print media at the textual core of students' vernacular literacy practices may undermine the efforts toward permeability that Connors made in opening his language arts classroom to children's self-selected texts. An impermeability to the non-print media that students engage with in their vernacular literacy practices as well as the transmedial ways in which students engage with those texts limits the extent to which academic literacy tasks could truly be scaffolded on students' vernacular literacies. Thus, while a

great number of books that accurately represent the textual core of boys' vernacular literacy practices did become visible in Connors' permeable classroom, many other kinds of texts that play equally important roles in those practices as well as critical aspects of the literacy practices themselves remained invisible. This is an ironic missed opportunity, as transmediation involves a sophisticated synthesis of the very strategies that Connors emphasized in his language arts curriculum – visualization, drawing personal and intertextual connections, making inferences, and summarizing main and supporting details – only applied across a broader, multimodal mediascape than Connors' classroom practices afforded.

Question Three

How and to what extent do the vernacular and academic literacy practices of these boys differ from those of the girls within the same class?

Girls and boys: Texts. Quantitatively, boys as a group made more documented text selections, and they made those selections from a wider range of genres and media than did girls. Of the 672 text selections documented across all contexts in this study, 379 (56.4%) were made by boys and 293 (43.6%) by girls. This overall difference is likely attributable to the large discrepancy between the number of recreational reading texts self-reported by focal boys and girls (see Table A3). Boys also made more text selections per capita than girls (15.75 to 12.208, respectively), although this difference is not statistically significant ($t=1.116$, $df=46$, $p>0.1$). As can be seen on Table A6, of the 21 genres from which focal students made text selections over the course of the school year, boys' selections for vernacular purposes represented 17 genres compared to 12 for girls. For academic purposes, boys made selections from 14 genres, while girls' selections

came from 13. Similar trends are found when comparing the different media represented by boys' and girls' text selections, as depicted on Table A9, with boys' vernacular text selections representing five different media compared to three for girls. Boys' tendency to select reading materials from a wider range of genres than girls held across all academic and vernacular contexts in which text selections were documented in this study, as did the tendency for their selections to represent a wider variety of media.

In terms of authors and titles represented, the full dataset of girls' text selections across all contexts was as diverse as the boys', with no single title or author dominating girls' choices for any purpose. While four of the authors listed on Table A5 were selected exclusively by boys, only one author was selected exclusively by girls: Heinrich Bauer North America, publisher of *J-14* magazine, which is also the only title listed on Table A4 that was selected exclusively by girls.

Like boys, girls overwhelmingly selected works created for the young adult audience, although in contrast to boys, readability levels were more stable across their selections for academic and vernacular contexts than they were for boys. As shown in Tables A7 and A8, less than one third of one grade level equivalent separates the mean readability levels of girls' selections for vernacular and academic purposes on both the Fog and Flesch-Kincaid scales. Although the trend runs in the opposite direction than for boys, with girls' academic text selections scoring slightly higher than their vernacular text selections, the difference is not statistically significant on either scale and stands in stark contrast to the full grade level difference in readability scores between boys' vernacular and academic text selections.

When asked "what are some things that get you really excited about reading?"

during their first interview, focal boys were more likely than girls to make explicit references to defining characteristics of their most favored genres in their responses. Chipmunk indicated a preference for books that feature "disgusting, interesting and completely weird things that go beyond your imagination," while Link prefers books that encourage him "to make pictures in my head." Billy Bob, an avid reader of *Michigan/American Chillers* titles, responded that what gets him most excited is simply "reading about stuff that I like ... if it doesn't interest me, I won't want to read it. But if it's basketball or (like the one I'm reading) werewolves or mega-monsters, or all that stuff, I'll like it because that's the kind of stuff I like." Sparty answered succinctly: "Action ... unlike a textbook." According to B-Rad, "if they're starting to like get in a fight, it's kind of exciting, because you kind of wonder what's coming next. But sometimes they set up ... like fighting, fighting, fighting really hard and they get hurt, but ... that's exciting because you want to know what happens next." Both Gatorade and Montel referred to "unsolved mysteries" and "scary stuff," while Tiger listed "scary books, science fiction and sports" as his primary areas of interest. In all of these comments, boys revealed that what gets them most excited about reading is the chance to experience many of the hallmarks of what is often popularly known as "genre fiction," which encompasses fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery and action/adventure. For these boys, the genre of a particular text is an important consideration in deciding whether or not to engage with it, as the text's generic affiliation provides some guarantee that favored content may lie within.

When prompted with the same question, focal girls had very different responses. Ciera S. said that what gets her excited about reading is "what happens in the books, just

the things that go on, and some of the things that the characters do, and sometimes the titles are really catching, or my friends recommend them and I want to see what they are to me." Alicia indicated a preference for "books that have pictures, not a lot of pictures, but some pictures so I can see what's going on." Monkey noted that what gets her excited about reading involves a social component: "if someone tells me about a book, I'll check it out and read it. If I didn't like them, I'd still tell people about them, it's just I'd find a different type of book that I think I'd be interested in, that might be interesting to them." Paris answered, "to see what happens next," while Vampira pointed to "how much details [sic] they have in them," and Spongebob couldn't think of anything that she felt got her excited about reading. These responses differ from those given by focal boys to the extent that the girls tended not to refer to particular genres or textual content, but rather to more general characteristics of the reading experience or textual elements that are not genre-specific. In general, genre was much less of a salient characteristic in choosing to engage with a given text than it was for the focal boys.

Nevertheless, girls' text selections did demonstrate some clear genre preferences. While a narrower range of genres was represented among girls' selections than among boys', fantasy and realistic fiction were still the most popular genres for girls as well as for boys across academic and vernacular contexts, a pattern clearly demonstrated on Table A6. However, in contrast to boys, girls' realistic fiction text selections were exclusively books about family or peer relationships, featuring female protagonists, such as *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* or *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*, while boys' selections in this genre covered a wider variety of themes, including outdoor adventure stories (e.g., *Hatchet*), sports-themed dramas (e.g., *Ironman*), and humorous

school-based novels (e.g., *Dork in Disguise*), although boys almost exclusively selected novels with male protagonists. Further, while boys' interests in imaginative fiction stretched beyond fantasy to include science fiction and supernatural thrillers, girls' interests in this area were strictly limited to fantasy novels. The only academic or vernacular context in which a genre other than fantasy or realistic fiction was the most popularly selected text for girls was the culminating activity on visualization skills, where teen fashion and celebrity magazines like *J-14* were the most popular.

Serial works were as popular among girls as they were among boys, although the proportions of girls' series-based text selections were more evenly distributed between academic and vernacular contexts, while for boys, series-based texts were more strongly concentrated in vernacular contexts. Among focal students, 117 serial works were documented in academic contexts (approximately 48% of focal students' academic text selections), while 152 serial works were documented in vernacular contexts (just under 62% of focal students' vernacular text selections). Table A10 is a contingency table presenting the frequency distribution of series and non-series text selections across academic and vernacular contexts for focal boys and girls. A 2x4 chi-square analysis indicates a significant, although low, association between the variables (χ^2(3, N = 489) = 12.0405, $p < 0.05$, $\Phi_c = 0.16$). One trend we can see from this distribution is that both focal boys and girls made more overall text selections from serial than from non-serial works, and that non-serial works were selected in greater numbers for academic purposes than for vernacular purposes by both focal boys and girls. Additionally, both focal boys and girls selected more serial than non-serial works for vernacular purposes, although the ratio of serial-to-non-serial works in vernacular contexts is higher for boys (1.75:1) than

for girls (1.39:1). However, serial works were selected in greater numbers for vernacular purposes than for academic purposes by focal boys, while serial works were represented slightly more in focal girls' academic selections than among their vernacular selections. What this distribution pattern suggests is that while serial works play an important role in both the academic and vernacular literacy practices of focal boys and focal girls, boys were more likely to pursue their series-based interests outside of school while girls were likely to pursue their series-based reading in both contexts.

An important contrast between the series-based interests of boys and girls in this study that might help explain this discrepancy is that, as discussed earlier, boys' serial interests tended to range across a variety of media, while girls' serial interests were almost exclusively print-based. Indeed, as shown in Table A9, girls made very few text selections outside of print-based media for either vernacular or academic purposes, and thus the generally print-centric permeability of Connors' language arts curriculum more easily afforded the appearance of girls' print-based serial commitments than it did the multimedia commitments of many boys' serial interests.

Some girls, like Riley and SpongeBob, took advantage of the element of choice in Connors' language arts assignments to explore book series that they were interested in, such as *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Connors used the first volume in the series, *The Bad Beginning*, as a read-aloud, and some students who had not read from the series before became eager to read further volumes. SpongeBob devoted as many of her Genre Project selections as she could, as well as her Book Project selection, to this series, reading up through volume 7 by the end of the school year. Riley followed a similar path, making it through volume 6 with her project book selections, as did Ciera S., who

devoted much of her early independent reading time to the series, and Paris, who read up through volume 9. Brittany credits the series for "getting me to love reading," and used her project choices to finish as many *Series of Unfortunate Events* titles as she could get hold of, as well as to launch into a new book series, *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. Not every focal girl was interested in the *Series of Unfortunate Events*, and not every focal girl chose serial works to fulfill academic reading obligations (e.g., Kalekidan, an English language learner from Ethiopia, who made no serial selections in any academic context, or Vampira, who read the first five books of the *Harry Potter* series over the course of the school year, but did not claim that reading for any assignment). However, eight of the eleven focal girls read at least two or more books from different series for academic purposes over the course of the year and all eleven read at least one series-based book for vernacular purposes.

To be fair, many boys did pursue print-based series interests, as well as the print components of transmedial series interests, in academic contexts, too. Thor, for example, selected volumes from the *Dragonslayer's Academy* and *Charlie Bone* series for the Genre and Book Projects, and all of the focal boys except for Montel read at least two or more books from various series (the most popular being *Michigan/American Chillers*) for academic purposes over the course of the year. Meanwhile, Gatorade read a *Jedi Apprentice* novel and Link read a George Lucas biography for the Genre Project, both books representative of their transmedial interest in *Star Wars*. However, the main idea here is that the series-based texts with which boys engaged within academic contexts scratch the surface of boys' serial interests, much of which, by their transmedial nature, could not become visible within an otherwise permeable curriculum.

Girls and boys: Contexts. In addition to differences in the kinds of texts they selected for various purposes, girls also demonstrated different reading behaviors than boys, most notably during DEAR sessions. Girls were more likely than boys to select texts for DEAR sessions that they had also selected to fulfill other academic requirements, such as the Genre or Book Projects. Of the 58 text selections made by girls for DEAR sessions, 23 (or approximately 40%) were texts that they had also selected to read for the Genre or Book Projects. Of the 94 text selections made by boys for DEAR sessions, 17 (or approximately 18%) were texts that they had also selected to read for the Genre or Book Projects. This difference suggests that girls as a whole were in one sense more strategic in their text selections for DEAR time than were boys, taking advantage of DEAR time to read texts in fulfillment of other language arts projects rather than to read wholly for pleasure. This is not to claim that reading a text for pleasure and reading a text to fulfill an assignment are mutually exclusive purposes, especially in the context of a permeable curriculum. What it does suggest is that girls were more likely than boys to make instrumental text selections during DEAR time, choosing texts in the service of satisfying other academic requirements.

While boys as a group selected more texts to read during DEAR sessions over the course of the school year, within a given DEAR session, girls were more likely to commit to a single text than were boys, who in turn were more likely to circulate between two or more texts. The following excerpt from field notes taken during one DEAR session is a typical description of boys' reading habits during DEAR time:

> "Before DEAR time starts, Link returns 1 book to the classroom library (*Dork in Disguise*) and takes another (*Ghosts*). Later, he returns *Ghosts* and gets *Lawn*

Weenies from his locker. One boy [non-focal] reads, then returns his first choice

from the classroom library. Another boy [non-focal] had taken *Captain*

Underpants #1, then hung out at the classroom library until [Mr. Connors] asks

him to return to his seat. He then read another book that he had brought. Tiger has

youth bible with him on his desk, but still goes to school library, returning with a

Larry Bird book. Montel reads *Everest*, from the classroom library. Sparty reads

an *American Chillers* volume. Axel takes four paperbacks from the classroom

library, all volumes from the Narnia series, and he takes the series box as well. He

spends DEAR time shuffling the books around in the box and fanning the pages.

When [Connors] approaches, he selects one of the books, puts the others back (his

desk abuts the classroom library) and reads silently."

In this excerpt, Sparty and Montel each read one book for the whole DEAR session, but

their behaviors were atypical for the boys in the classroom. The rest of the boys described

in this excerpt circulated between two or more books during the reading time, and the

depth of their reading commitment ranged between Link's active reading of all three

books he had with him on this occasion to Axel's flirting with multiple texts before

briefly settling down on one book to read. This tendency of many boy readers to roam

between multiple texts during the course of a single DEAR session was documented

during nearly every regular DEAR session that was observed,[7] and stands in strong

contrast to the typical behaviors exhibited by many girl readers, who tended to commit to

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[7]As discussed in the previous chapter, 20 to 30 minutes of DEAR time was regularly scheduled at the start of each day, while impromptu DEAR sessions were frequently added to the classroom routine at transition points during the day as students completed independent work in one subject and anticipated the advent of the next activity. These impromptu DEAR sessions rarely lasted more than 10 minutes and did not afford much time to engage with more than one text. The contrast between some boys' roaming between multiple texts and many girls' tendency to devote their full DEAR session to a single text is more characteristic of the regularly scheduled DEAR sessions than of the impromptu DEAR sessions.

single texts not only throughout an individual DEAR session, but often across sessions. For example, JB, a non-focal female student, spent several weeks of DEAR time reading *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* exclusively. PS, another non-focal female student, read *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* over the course of several DEAR sessions. Few boys demonstrated such a commitment to a single text from one DEAR session to the next, frequently starting fresh each DEAR session with a new text selected that same day from the school or classroom library, as demonstrated in the above vignette. Montel and Sparty, who read from one book for the entirety of the DEAR session described above, were not observed reading these same books during another DEAR session.

During DEAR sessions, girls also tended to be more willing to put their reading on display than did boys. Figures B11 through B14 are four photographs taken in Mr. Connors' classroom one morning after a regular DEAR session, while students were away for gym class. Near most seats in these images can be seen the large zip-up binders in which Connors' students kept their handouts, notes, homework and school supplies. Because students in Connors' and Price's classes switch between their classrooms multiple times each day and do not have regular desks for storing supplies, these binders serve as portable carry-alls in lieu of backpacks or frequent trips to student lockers. Note that books can be seen atop some of the binders, particularly in Figure B15, the lower right-hand corner of Figure B12 and the lower left-hand corner of Figure B13. In each of these instances, the binders with books atop them belong to girls, while most of the binders that are zipped up with no books atop them belong to boys. These images are typical of what was observed throughout the school year when Connors' students would

leave the classroom for a specials class (e.g., gym, music or art) or recess, especially after

a regular or impromptu DEAR session. At the end of DEAR time, girls were more likely

to leave their DEAR texts on display, while boys were more likely to either conceal their

DEAR texts in their binders or return them to the classroom library. With rare exception,

girls were more likely than boys to keep their DEAR texts (which as noted above were

more likely to be texts that fulfilled other assignments) conveniently accessible outside of

DEAR time, and were frequently observed reading from their DEAR texts as the course

of the day afforded brief opportunities for impromptu, unofficial silent reading. For

example, PS, a non-focal girl, was observed on several occasions over the course of a

single morning reading from *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* in brief spurts during

daily announcements, teacher-directed mini-lessons, and transitions between activities

within Language Arts instruction. Link was also observed over the course of that same

morning reading from *The Wish List* whenever an opportunity presented itself, but Link's

behavior in this regard is atypical for boys observed in this study.

Boys! [and girls]. We might conclude from the foregoing discussion that

Connors' permeable classroom afforded greater continuity between girls' vernacular and

academic literacy practices than it did for boys. The most popular genres among girls'

text selections for academic literacy practices were a more accurate reflection of the most

popular genres selected by girls for vernacular purposes than was the case for boys,

whose academic text selections were drawn from fewer genres than those made for

vernacular purposes. Texts selected by girls for academic purposes were also more in line

with those made for vernacular purposes than were boys' academic selections in terms of

readability and series status, and girls did not demonstrate as much interest as boys did in

media that were generally excluded from Connors' otherwise permeable classroom. Finally, most girls usually had books at the ready to engage with whenever a moment might present itself and were more likely than boys to put their reading materials on display.

However, while many boys were eager to engage in social identity development by making aspects of their vernacular literacy practices visible through sanctioned and unsanctioned literacy events in Connors' classroom, there is evidence to suggest that at least some girls were unwilling to take advantage of the permeability afforded by Connors' classroom to make visible important aspects of their vernacular literacy practices. Conversely, there is also some evidence that not every literacy practice that girls made visible in Connors' classroom was a clear analogue to an "authentic" vernacular literacy practice. Despite many surface continuities between girls' vernacular and academic literacy practices, it may be that instead of capitalizing on the permeability of Connors' classroom as a potential nexus between vernacular literacies and social identity, some girls "played school," leaving cherished aspects of their selves at the schoolhouse door.

Prior scholarship has suggested that middle school boys tend to focus their reading more on non-book texts, such as magazines, newspapers and even baseball cards, as a function of an increasingly efferent stance toward print by which boys seek out texts that will reinforce their knowledge base on favorite activities, such as sports and other hobbies (Beatty, 2000; Farris, 1995; Sullivan, 2003; Wheeler, 1984; Wicks, 1995). While not every boy who participated in this study demonstrated a strong interest in sports, sports-oriented texts were almost exclusively selected by boys, many of whom played a

variety of sports themselves and who clearly deepened their interest and participation in their favorite sports through their reading choices. B-Rad and Axel, two focal boys with a passion for football, made a number of football-oriented text selections, and B-Rad discussed how he had tried to adapt a play described in a Matt Christopher novel during one of his games. Tiger and Montel played together on a basketball team, and their text selections reflect their abiding interest in the sport, with basketball-themed informational books, biographies, sports fiction novels, magazines and even an inspirational work (*The Right Way to Win: How Athletes Can Place God First in Their Hearts*) appearing among texts they selected across all contexts. As noted earlier, Tiger and Montel's DEAR readings of sports-themed texts frequently turned into shared experiences with other boys.

Sharing a similar passion for basketball, SpongeBob and Ciera S., two focal girls, also played together on a basketball team and attended every Homestead High School girls' basketball game that their schedules allowed together, including tournament games as Homestead's girls' team competed for the state championship in its division during the period of this study. They also attended several home games of the local university women's basketball team, even following the team to Indianapolis to watch it play in the Final Four of the NCAA tournament. During the bookstore browsing activity, which these girls participated in together, they each selected non-fiction books on the NBA, the WNBA and NCAA women's basketball. It might be argued that these two girls were even bigger fans of basketball than any of the boys in this study. However, any texts reflecting such interests were entirely limited to vernacular literacy events, and between the two girls, only SpongeBob brought a single sports-themed text into any academic

context: a copy of *Sports Illustrated*, which she selected for the culminating activity on visualization skills and in which she focused entirely on an article about an NFL star, not an article about basketball. Furthermore, neither girl participated in any formal or informal sports-related classroom conversations, despite ample opportunities to do so. As visible as boys' sports interests became in Connors' classroom, these girls' vernacular interests in sports remained virtually invisible within the otherwise permeable academic context. This is particularly ironic, given that Connors was himself a junior varsity boys' and girls' track coach and frequently initiated brief, informal conversations on current sports topics with the whole class. However, only the boys would respond to Connors' prompts.

Although no other girls who participated in this study demonstrated as strong an interest in sports as did SpongeBob and Ciera S., there is no reason to suppose that the other girls in Connors' classroom had any less of an interest in sports than boys, given ample research demonstrating that in the wider population, women are just as likely as men to identify themselves as sports fans (Costa, 2003; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick & Jacquemotte, 2000). Why even the most passionately dedicated girls' interests in sports did not become visible within Connors' permeable classroom while boys' sporting interests flourished can only be speculated. While neither Mr. Connors nor any of the boys in this study appeared to actively discourage the girls from sharing or engaging with their sports interests within the academic contexts documented here, the invisibility of girls' sports interests in Connors' otherwise permeable classroom indicates that at some level for these students, sports as a visible social practice was a male preserve, regardless of the prominence of sports within some girls' extracurricular lives and vernacular

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literacy practices. The causes of this phenomenon are beyond the scope of this study; it could be that SpongeBob and Ciera S. simply didn't feel like reading about sports at school or it could be the result of a complex constellation of social forces operating across the students' lifespan. Nevertheless, the virtual absence of sports texts among the text selections made by girls for academic purposes, despite evidence that sports formed an important element of these girls' social identities outside of school, suggests that as amenable as Connors' classroom was to many aspects of girls' vernacular literacy practices, it did not serve as a nexus of literacy and identity for some girls as it did for many boys.

<center>*Question Four*</center>

What attitudes toward vernacular and academic literacy practices do these boys hold, how do they compare with the attitudes of other students, and how do those attitudes change over the course of an academic year in a book club based classroom?

As described in Chapter 3, students in Mr. Connors' Language Arts classes were administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) at the start of the 2004-05 school year and again at the end to assess the extent to which students' attitudes toward reading for academic and recreational purposes might change in the context of the permeable curriculum implemented by Connors. While 41 students were present for the first ERAS administration in the fall, and 42 were present for the spring administration, only 36 students were present for both administrations. Within this group were 19 boys and 17 girls (including 10 focal boys and 8 focal girls), and it is the scores from these students that were used for the analyses that are reported here.

At the start of the school year, boys' attitudes toward academic and recreational

reading were almost identical, and group means were comparable to national norms for sixth graders in the fall as published by McKenna and Kear (1990). Table A11 presents the mean scores for these subscales for the fall administration by gender. As can be seen in the table, the mean scores for girls on both subscales were higher than those for boys, and simple t-test comparisons of these means reveal that the difference on the recreational subscale was significant while the difference on the academic subscale was not. When comparing subscale scores within groups, McKenna and Kear indicate that a difference of 3 points or more between subscales should be regarded as a significant discrepancy in attitude toward reading for different purposes. For neither boys nor girls does the difference between mean scores on the academic and recreational subscales exceed this threshold.

By the spring administration, mean scores for both boys and girls on both subscales of the ERAS had dropped. While the drop in boys' attitudes toward academic reading was statistically significant, the drop in boys' attitudes toward recreational reading was not. Drops on both subscales for girls were significant, however. Table A12 shows t-test results indicating that at the end of the year, the gaps between boys' and girls' scores were relatively unchanged from the fall administration, with the difference between boys' and girls' attitudes toward recreational reading remaining significant. Paired sample t-test comparisons of boys' and girls' recreational subscale scores from fall to spring administrations of the ERAS (Table A13) demonstrate that while scores for both boys and girls dropped, only the drop for girls was statistically significant, and both groups' mean scores for the recreational subscale are within one standard deviation of national norms for sixth graders. Comparing boys' and girls' academic subscale scores

from fall to spring administration (Table A14, paired sample t-test comparisons), we can see that scores for both boys and girls dropped, and in contrast to the recreational subscale, both drops are statistically significant, yet still within one standard deviation of national norms. Finally, while the difference between the mean scores for boys on the academic and recreational subscales (24.37 and 24.95, respectively) at the spring administration does not exceed the 3 point threshold specified by McKenna and Kear, the difference in girls' mean scores on the two subscales does (26.15 and 29.77 respectively). This indicates that girls held more positive attitudes toward reading for recreational than for academic purposes at the end of the year, while boys' attitudes were comparable across contexts.

To summarize the findings regarding reading attitude, both boys' and girls' attitudes toward academic reading as measured by the ERAS dropped significantly over the course of the 2004-05 school year, and while both groups' attitudes toward recreational reading dropped, only the drop in girls' scores was statistically significant. The difference between boys' recreational and academic subscale scores remained stable between fall and spring administrations, and stayed within the 3 point threshold specified by McKenna and Kear for judging a significant discrepancy between attitudes for recreational and academic reading. However, the difference between girls' recreational and academic subscale scores widened between the fall and spring administrations to exceed the 3 point threshold, indicating that girls as a group held more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than toward academic reading at the end of the school year. A comparison of boys' and girls' mean subscale scores on the spring administration with national norms reveals that both means for both groups fall within one standard deviation

of the national norms for sixth graders. Possible explanations for this overall decline in

reading attitude among Mr. Connors' language arts students will be offered in the

following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Introduction

Over the past decade, one of the overriding concerns of adolescent literacy

research has been to better understand the extracurricular literacy practices in which

middle and high school students engage, on the premise that more detailed knowledge of

these "real world" literacies could provide educators a scaffold upon which to construct

more effective academic literacy learning environments. However, as Alvermann et al.

(2007) argue, this is an area that remains "largely unstudied and/or underreported ...

despite continued calls for exploring the potential of such literacies to serve as

springboards for actively engaging youth in academic reading tasks" (p. 34). Our

contemporary understanding of the literacy practices that adolescents engage in for

personal (or what in this study are termed vernacular) purposes emerges from a body of

scholarship based on large-scale surveys of recreational reading and leisure time

activities (e.g., Hall & Coles, 1999; Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005), in-depth

interviews with individual or small groups of students (e.g., Cavazos-Kottke, 2006;

Reeves, 2004), best practice reports of classroom contexts and activities that promote

active engagement with core teacher-selected texts (e.g., Brozo, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm,

2006), and ethnographic accounts of adolescents participating in extracurricular media

clubs (e.g., Alvermann, Hagood, Heron-Hruby, Hughes, Williams & Yoon, 2007;

Alvermann, Huddleston & Hagood, 2004). Absent from the literature is an exploration of

what a permeable classroom structure that attempts to embrace the texts of students'

vernacular literacy practices – not as on-ramps to engagement with core teacher-selected

texts but as the core texts themselves – might reveal about adolescents' literacy practices as well as how adolescents' attitudes toward reading might fluctuate in the context of such a classroom.

This study was designed to enrich our understanding of adolescents' vernacular literacy practices, particularly those of boys, through an analysis of the text selections made by a group of sixth grade students in just such a permeable classroom structure and through a comparison of the text selections made by a subset of those students for vernacular purposes outside of that classroom context. Specifically, this study sought answers to four main questions:

1. What are the vernacular literacy practices of a class of middle school boys and what kinds of texts do these boys engage with in those practices?

2. How and to what extent do these boys' vernacular literacies become visible within a language arts program structured around students' self-selected texts?

3. How and to what extent do the vernacular and academic literacy practices of these boys differ from those of the girls within the same class? and

4. What attitudes toward vernacular and academic literacy practices do these boys hold, how do they compare with the attitudes of other students, and how do those attitudes change over the course of an academic year in a book club based classroom?

As the previous two chapters have detailed, Ed Connors' sixth grade Language Arts classroom at Harwell Middle School was the site for a year long investigation into these questions. Text selections made by all students in Connors' two Language Arts classes for a variety of academic purposes were documented and analyzed. Text selections made

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by a focal group of students from Connors' classes for vernacular purposes were also

documented and were compared with the text selections that those focal students made

for academic purposes. Comparisons were also made between the text selections made by

boys and girls for academic and vernacular purposes, both at the whole group level and

within the subgroup of focal students. Results of these analyses were detailed in Chapter

Four.

In this chapter, the significance of these findings for better understanding the

literacy practices of adolescents, especially boys, as well as implications for instruction

and for teacher education will be discussed. To situate this study's findings within the

current scholarship on boys and literacy, the discussion in this chapter is organized

around three main focal points: the texts that defined the physical landscape of the

participants' literacy practices; the curricular and extracurricular contexts that defined the

social and psychological landscape of those practices; and lastly, the role of the

classroom teacher as a facilitator of literacy practices across and within those contexts.

Limitations of the current study and possible directions for future research will be

addressed throughout.

The Texts – Currents of Diversity

The Long Tail

The first big idea that emerges from a consideration of the texts selected by the

boys and girls in Mr. Connors' Language Arts classes for vernacular and academic

purposes is the high degree of diversity in the overall set of text selections. A teacher or

librarian looking to this study for guidance as to particular authors or titles to keep in

stock to meet the demands of students' reading appetites would not get very far with this

dataset beyond a recommendation to offer an ample array of *Michigan/American Chillers*

books and some Matt Christopher classics to appeal to boys, and perhaps to keep a few

sets of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* handy. Ultimately, there were

no big "hits" with the whole group of students, a microcosmic illustration of the "Long

Tail" phenomenon (Anderson, 2006). According to Anderson, when consumers are free

to select from a virtually limitless array of different texts (such as when shopping for

songs on iTunes or for books at Amazon.com, for example), very few individual titles

emerge as big hits. Instead, the vast majority of songs downloaded on iTunes or books

purchased at Amazon.com are selected in relatively small numbers by relatively few

consumers. If a frequency distribution of the number of downloads of the top 1,000,000

best selling songs on iTunes were plotted, the result would be a curve with a very steep,

sudden decline, followed by a long steady plateau that never reaches zero (see Figure

B16 for a prototypical Long Tail curve). The narrow head of the curve is where we find a

few big hits, appealing to a broad spectrum of listeners; the Long Tail of the curve is

where we find not only the vast majority of the iTunes inventory, but also the vast

majority of downloads, period. In other words, the market is not driven by hits that appeal

to large agglomerations of consumers, but rather by songs that have niche appeal to

relatively small groups of people. Anderson (2006) finds this phenomenon not just in

online marketplaces such as iTunes and Amazon.com, but also in television ratings,

movie attendance, and web searching behaviors. The most recent statistics released by

Nielsen BookScan, which tracks approximately 70% of book sales across 6,500 retail

locations, provide additional confirmation of the Long Tail phenomenon: of the

approximately 1,466,000 unique titles sold in the United States in 2006, 1,123,000 (or

just under 78%) sold fewer than 99 copies, while only 483 (or less than a tenth of one

percent) sold more than 100,000 copies. (Nielsen Bookscan, in Harper's Index, 2007).

While a marketplace of reading materials with a virtually infinite inventory was

not literally available to Connors' students, they did nonetheless have access to two large

classroom libraries (Connors' and his team-teacher, Ms. Price's), a well-stocked and

constantly updated school library in a network with hundreds of other school and public

libraries statewide, two large public libraries within five miles of the school, and one

major chain bookstore in the Homestead district. Whether available on the shelf of a local

library, by interlibrary loan from a networked library, or for purchase at a brick-and-

mortar or online bookstore, Connors' students did not lack for access to texts, and the

focal students interviewed in this study indicated that they utilized all of these sources to

find texts that they were interested in reading. Given that over half of the text selections

documented in this study were only selected once by a single student and that the most

popular texts appeared among the text selections of fewer than 20% of the students, we

can see the Long Tail phenomenon in small-scale. A previous investigation into the

reading preferences of a small group of talented middle school boys found little to no

overlap in the particular authors and titles selected by that study's five participants, and

the question of whether a similar pattern might be seen with a larger, mixed gender group

of general readers was raised (Cavazos-Kottke, 2006). The results of this study suggest

that rather than congregating around a canon of popular texts, the crop of text selections

yielded by a larger and more diverse group of readers becomes spread over an even larger

array of authors and titles.

How might teachers interested in supporting students' academic literacy skills by

creating opportunities for aspects of their vernacular literacy practices to enter into the classroom context deal with such potentially unruly diversity? Acknowledging that students' vernacular literacy lives are characterized by a much wider range of print and non-print texts than the traditional language arts curriculum (or for that matter the average pre-service teacher whose apprenticeship of observation likely took place in the context of such a curriculum) may be prepared to deal with, Anstey and Bull (2006) offer the following perspective:

> There are two possible responses to these ideas when selecting texts for use in the classroom. One is for the teacher to limit the texts and review their content carefully, using only texts that meet an agreed-on set of criteria regarding the topics, values, and attitudes of the content. This approach would ensure that students met only appropriate texts in school, but it would not equip them to deal with texts outside of school that presented contrasting ideas, values and attitudes, often very carefully disguised. A second response, which more appropriately supports multiliteracies' goals, is for teachers to ensure that a broad range of texts are available and help students develop the skills to analyse these texts. ... In this way, students will become more discriminatory and have skills to deal with texts they encounter in many contexts. (p. 37)

It is important to note that Anstey and Bull do not claim that taking the second stance toward students' vernacular literacy practices will necessarily improve students' attitudes toward reading, raise achievement or foster life-long reading habits. Rather, they modestly argue that helping students develop critical reading skills with the texts that characterize their vernacular literacy lives will simply empower them to more effectively

"deal with" the various texts they encounter there.

As Alvermann et al. (2007) note (and I discuss in Chapter Two of this dissertation), the literature lacks conclusive data on the extent to which reading habits, attitudes or achievement may be affected by scaffolding students' development in academic literacy practices upon self-selected texts that represent students' vernacular literacy practices. Setting aside the fact that the non-experimental design of this study does not allow for causal claims, the drops in reading attitudes documented among students in this study certainly do not lend empirical support to an argument that reading attitudes may improve in the context of student choice, particularly given the structural impermeability of certain elements of Connors' curriculum to the non-book and non-print texts that played a part in many boys' vernacular literacy lives. Nevertheless, it should be noted that none of the drops in reading attitude documented here represent serious declines beyond those which might be expected among sixth graders, and thus while the results of this study do not make an unequivocal statement on the power of choice to positively affect young adolescents' attitudes toward reading, they by no means suggest that choice is demotivating. Rather, the comments of Billy Bob, a focal boy, lend some support to those arguing for greater choice as a positive in adolescent literacy instruction, no matter how elusive causal data may be:

> I recently had a change in attitude toward reading. The books I was trying to get into before, I didn't like them, so I found a book from the *Chillers*. I started reading them and really liked them. ... Reading about stuff that I like ... if it doesn't interest me, I won't want to read it. But if it's basketball or – like the one I'm reading – werewolves or mega-monsters, or all that stuff, I'll like it because

that's the kind of stuff I like.

What Billy Bob describes here is a kind of self-discovery that we might hope to see in all reluctant readers, given a space to explore personal interests and become captivated by a book. In contrast to the general trend of attitude scores among Connors' students, Billy Bob's attitudes toward both academic and recreational reading improved over the course of the 2004-05 school year. While a causal link cannot be made between Billy Bob's attitude and the opportunities for choice provided by Mr. Connors, it is clear that Billy Bob saw the chance to experiment with different reading materials on his own recognizance as a positive force in his literacy development. Billy Bob's experience resonates with me because it echoes testimonials I heard from boys in my own teaching practice who discovered (or rediscovered) a love of reading upon experiencing the right book. Unfortunately, as the results of this study demonstrate, the right book may be different for every student, making a commitment to offering a high degree of student choice across the curriculum an especially challenging proposition.

When given ample opportunities to self-select reading materials for a variety of academic and vernacular contexts, the fact that there was relatively little repetition of authors and titles across students' text selections suggests that educators hoping to offer young adolescent readers an attractive selection of interesting texts in a classroom or school library would be advised to stock their shelves with a wide assortment of different authors and titles, rather than investing in class sets of a limited selection of notable texts.

Given a strong preference for texts published within the last five to ten years, another implication for practice from this wide diversity of authors and titles is that teachers would also be well advised to maintain an active interest in current publications

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and to continually refresh their awareness of new titles and authors that might appeal to their students. While the annual lists of children's, young adults' and teachers' book choices published by the International Reading Association (IRA) provide a convenient snapshot of titles and authors popular with large groups of readers, it is important to note that the process by which the IRA compiles these lists renders that snapshot two years old by the time it reaches press. The 2007 lists, for example, are based solely on books published in 2005, and it should be noted that of the 300 titles presented on the ten most recent young adults' book choices lists (representing books published between 1996 and 2005, the period from which the vast majority of texts selected by students in this study were published), only 13 of those titles appear in the database of this study, and only four of the authors whose works appear on these lists (JK Rowling, Gordon Korman, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor and Louis Sachar) are among the most frequently selected authors in this study. Neither Lemony Snicket nor Jonathan Rand, who did publish books during this period and who were the two most frequently selected authors in this study, appear on any of the IRA's young adults' choices lists.

If we want to open our classrooms to the texts of students' vernacular literacy practices in order to scaffold academic learning on students' existing funds of knowledge and perhaps increase motivation for engaging in academic literacy tasks (an ideal that Alvermann et al. (2007) remind us remains elusive in adolescent literacy research and practice), we have to accept that students are not likely to congregate around a single messianic text or even a small group of texts. Rather, we need to be able to cope with a potentially unruly collection of texts, many of which we may not particularly enjoy ourselves. We might hope that lots of students will pick up *Harry Potter and the*

Sorcerer's Stone so that we can teach about mythic archetypes, explore connections to other classics of fantasy literature and marvel at the linguistic cleverness of the names that JK Rowling gives her characters. Certainly, some students will go in that direction, but we will also spend our time pointing out misuses of "its" and "it's" in the first chapter of *Kreepy Klowns of Kalamazoo* or explaining why students have to use complete sentences in their writing while Jonathan Rand gets to sell a million novels composed largely with sentence fragments.

My point here is not to discourage the practice of self-selection in language arts instruction, but rather to point out that when we encourage students to bring themselves and their tastes into the classroom, we potentially invite in a degree of diversity unprecedented by any of our prior experiences learning about literature. The apprenticeship of observation through which most language arts teachers passed as students likely involved a systematic study of a canon of texts that, no matter how progressively calculated to include diverse voices, was defined in advance by a content area expert and rarely open to student-defined interests. If we offer our students the challenge to select reading materials in accordance with their own tastes, abilities and interests – and they take us up on it – we will then be faced with the daunting task of recognizing each student's unique selections, because as Alvermann and her colleagues remind us, adolescents will regard such choices as an "experience of identity" (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 445; also, Alvermann, Huddleston & Hagood, 2004). The demotivational consequences of failing to recognize the "repertoires of practice" that children might choose to make visible in such a permeable environment can be knotty, especially if students interpret a teacher's reluctance to embrace the texts of their

vernacular literacies as a referendum on their identity (Nixon & Comber, 2006, p. 128; see also Reeves, 2004).

Underlying Patterns

Diversity should not be mistaken for chaos, however. While boys may appear to be "all over the place" in their reading habits (J. Rothschild, personal communication, July 7, 2007), the results of this study fortunately demonstrate that there are some predictable trends in boys' and girls' text selections that may better assist educators looking for guidance in stocking a class library or preparing to engage with a permeable classroom. As detailed in the previous chapter, books constituted the majority of the text selections made by the whole group of students across all contexts as well as those made by boys for vernacular purposes, although boys were more likely than girls to select texts from across a range of print and non-print media. Compared to their text selections for academic purposes, boys' text selections for vernacular purposes were more likely to come from a series, were spread across a wider range of genres, and were on average more advanced in terms of readability, even though their selections were predominantly texts marketed to a young adult audience. By far the most popular genre among boys' text selections for vernacular purposes was fantasy, followed by action, realistic fiction, mystery/thriller, sports and science fiction, which were represented in roughly equal numbers of text selections. Girls' text selections for vernacular purposes were more narrowly limited to works of fantasy and realistic fiction. It should be noted that these trends do not exist independently of each other in the dataset. The finding that boys favored series works in their text selections for vernacular purposes cut across the different media from which their text selections were made, and multiple media texts

were found within each of the most popular genre categories. For example, a popular science fiction franchise like *Star Wars* manifests itself in the full dataset of vernacular text selections as well as within individual focal students' sets of text selections as series of books, video games and movies. Series interests were not confined to a particular medium, but frequently crossed over into multiple media.

These trends in boys' text selections are in line with much contemporary scholarship on young adults' reading preferences. The popularity of imaginative fiction (including fantasy, science fiction, and most of the texts classified in this study as mystery/thriller, such as books from the *Michigan/American Chillers* and *Goosebumps* series) among young adolescent boys has been well established in prior studies, as has the popularity of series fiction (Cavazos-Kottke, 2006; Coles & Hall, 2002; Hall & Coles, 1999; Knowles & Smith, 2005; Nell, 1988; Newkirk, 2002; Sullivan, 2003, 2004; Wicks, 1995; Worthy, Moorman, Turner, 1999). The results of this study indicate that this is also true for girls, but what makes boys' preferences unique in this regard is that they are spread across a wider range of genres within this category, whereas girls' selections are more narrowly focused around fantasy. A preference among boys for texts that have strong visual appeal, both in terms of vivid language and graphic accompaniment, has also been documented in prior scholarship (Kajder, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2006; Sullivan, 2003).

The finding that the boys in this study made more overall text selections than girls does not have a precedent in the literature. Indeed, in the few studies that directly compare the leisure reading habits of boys and girls, the opposite trend is found (Coles & Hall, 2002). That boys' preferred reading materials come from a wider array of genres

than do girls' preferred materials is also a new finding. Prior scholarship on boys' genre preferences either has found very little difference from girls' preferences (e.g., Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999) or has focused on a narrow range of "boy-friendly" genres without comparison to girls' genre preferences, including non-fiction, humor, sports/outdoors and fantasy/science fiction (e.g., Sullivan, 2003, 2004). While sports and science fiction texts were found almost exclusively among boys' text selections, a preference for non-fiction and humor was not expressed any more strongly among boys in this study than among girls. The majority of non-fiction texts in this dataset were biographies and magazines, selected in roughly equal numbers by boys and girls for the Genre Project and the culminating activity on visualization skills, respectively.

One limitation of this study is that despite the clear variety of texts with which students engaged in their vernacular literacy practices, this variety is underreported to the extent that certain types of texts that focal students did mention in the course of interviews and informal conversations were not added into the text selection database. These kinds of texts were excluded from data analysis chiefly due to the logistical difficulties in isolating a discrete student-with-specific-text unit of analysis to assess students' selections of these kinds of texts. For example, most of the focal students mentioned in interviews that they frequently sought information about topics of personal interest on the Internet, but particular sites were neither solicited nor documented in the course of the interviews. Several focal students also made references to reading "the paper," without further elaborating on which papers they read, which sections of those papers they read, or the frequency with which they read them. Wicks (1995) found that newspapers were the most frequently read texts among the boys he surveyed, suggesting

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that this text form might have had more prominence among the vernacular literacy

practices of the students in this study had newspaper text selections been included in the

dataset. Televised sporting events (with the exception of *WWE Smackdown!*, which is a

weekly series with ongoing narrative arcs, more similar to a television serial drama than a

"traditional" sports broadcast; see Alvermann, Huddleston & Hagood, 2004) and sports

news programs were not documented, despite clear references to consumption of such

texts and despite the fact that since the 1960s, the prevailing aesthetic of American sports

broadcasting has been to cast the televised athletic competition into a rudimentary

narrative framework, such that as a text, it has more in common with the average

television drama than with the experience of a live sporting event (see Crawford, 2004,

and Jay, 2004). Finally, participants' engagement with popular music texts was not

documented. In the case of music, only one focal student, Gatorade, made a reference to

the Gwen Stefani song "Hollaback Girl" during his bookstore browsing interview, and

this was the sole occasion on which contemporary popular music was directly mentioned

by any participant in the entire study. Given that other scholarship has found listening to

popular music to be the leisure activity in which adolescents most frequently engage

(e.g., Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005; Perlstein, 2003), this omission is perhaps the most

glaring, and future research should seek ways to document participants' text selections in

this as well as the preceding areas such that these kinds of texts can be factored into the

overall portrait of adolescent literacy practices and that their representation therein can be

reliably compared with that of the other kinds of text documented in this study.

The Contexts – (Im)Permeable Semiotic Social Spaces

Transmediation

A major feature of boys' vernacular literacy practices that was documented in this study, but not fully capitalized upon by Ed Connors' otherwise permeable curriculum, is a tendency to engage in transmediation, or the synthesis of a complex meta-narrative across a range of media and delivery systems that each offer unique perspectives or bits of diegetic information on characters, stories or entire narrative worlds. The most obvious examples of transmediation come from the world of imaginative fiction (e.g., the *Star Wars* universe unfolding across films, novels and video games), but as this study has argued, sports fandom as enacted by many boys in this study offers an additional example of transmedial reading, with the added bonus that boys' transmediation across sports texts frequently involved an observable social component. The process by which boys in this study engaged in the work of social identity construction through transmedial allegiances became visible in Connors' classroom, although much of the social activity took place outside of sanctioned curricular space and Connors' language arts activities were largely impermeable to non-print media.

Writers on transmediation frequently describe it as a "natural" feature of everyday literacy practices, especially among contemporary adolescents, but rarely offer empirical evidence that adolescents actually engage in such practices. This assumption of naturalness is conveyed through rhetorical appeals to the reader to consider how one negotiates meaning by synthesizing information and ideas from a range of print and non-print media texts in one's daily life, and descriptions of teens simultaneously listening to digital music, surfing the Internet, watching videos and chatting with friends via instant messaging programs (e.g., Anstey & Bull, 2006; King & O'Brien, 2002; Semali, 2000, 2002). What evidence these authors do offer is usually more indicative of multitasking –

simultaneous engagement with multiple semiotic systems – than true transmediation.

Frequently cited is the Kaiser Family Foundation's *Generation M* report (Roberts, Fueho

& Rideout, 2005), which found that on the average day, young people are exposed to

approximately 8 ½ hours of media content in just 6 ½ hours of real time, indicating that at

least a quarter of that time involves simultaneous exposure to multiple media. However,

Generation M only reports media use; it does not investigate the meaning-making

strategies employed by media consumers. Flores-Koulish (2005) found a similar level of

saturation in her study of the media habits of pre-service teachers, providing some

description of the ways in which her participants synthesize meaning in a multimodal,

multitextual mediascape. Bruce (2002) provides anecdotes of teenagers engaging with a

variety of media texts, using such texts as "boundary objects" that allow adolescents "to

connect with each other by means of and through shared artifacts … [and] are integral to

the ways that these young people make meaning, communicate, and construct their social

lives" (p. 3). These authors all agree that it is incumbent upon teachers to facilitate the

development of students' critical faculties as they transmediate in order to nurture what

Gardner (2006) calls "the synthesizing mind," one which is able to construct new

knowledge from a variety of disciplines and information sources and one which Gardner

and all of the above cited authors celebrate as essential for effective citizenship,

leadership and occupational success in the modern age. However, while all of these

authors provide convincing arguments for the importance of developing such

competencies, for expanding schooled notions of literacy to embrace transmedial

practices, and for the centrality of transmediation in everyday literacies, none aside from

Flores-Koulish (2005) and Bruce (2002) offer empirical support for their assumptions of

the naturalness of transmediation. The talented boy readers studied in a previous investigation (Cavazos-Kottke, 2006) did demonstrate transmedial literacy practices, in one exemplary case constructing a detailed understanding of the Marvel Comics universe by transmediating between novel, comic book and film versions of *The Incredible Hulk* and *X-Men* as well as *Discovery Channel* documentary programs and tie-in books on evolution and even Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. This study fills a gap in the literature by providing empirically gathered support for claims that transmediation plays a significant role in the vernacular literacy lives of adolescents, and that the affinity spaces in which those transmedial literacy practices are carried out provide stages on which young adolescents construct social identities.

Extending on a limitation suggested earlier in this chapter, the extent to which multiple media play a role in boys' vernacular literacy practices is likely underrepresented in this study. Text selections for vernacular purposes were added to the database conservatively; focal students had to make reference to a specific text or series by title in one of the interviews for it to be entered into the database, and no text selections were added to the database by inference. For example, Link brought a strategy book for the Ruby and Sapphire versions of the GameBoy Advance game Pokemon for analysis in the culminating activity on visualization skills, and this book was entered into the database as an academic selection for the visualization activity. In his journal, Link wrote seven reasons for why he found this book interesting, including "It has been my specialty since I was like 5, 6 or 7 ... I'm a mastermind at it." On another occasion, Link brought a copy of *Nintendo Power* magazine to read during DEAR time, and he spent the period reading a series of articles on the upcoming Emerald version of Pokemon. It

would be reasonable to infer from the evidence that Link plays Pokemon and that the Pokemon series of games plays a significant role in his vernacular literacy practices. However, Link never discussed his video gaming interests in any of the interviews, even though he spoke in great detail about other texts he enjoyed outside of academic contexts, including movies and magazines as well as books. Another example is Chipmunk, who read an issue of *Game Informer* for his visualization activity text, yet did not discuss any particular video game titles during his interviews. It is likely that Chipmunk enjoys video gaming as part of his vernacular literacies, but no game text selections are attributed to him in the database. Thus, despite the stronger representation of a variety of media texts within the dataset of text selections documented for boys' vernacular literacy practices than those for girls, the true extent to which multiple media texts play a role in the vernacular literacy lives of focal boys is likely underestimated in the dataset.

Girls, Sports and Silence

Although Ed Connors' permeably structured language arts curriculum provided a portal for certain limited aspects of these transmedial vernacular literacy practices to become visible in an academic context (particularly where print-based media could be involved), it is important to note that while many boys took advantage of the opportunity to make those practices visible, some girls did not. The example discussed in Chapter 4 involved the appearance of sports-themed transmedial literacies exclusively within the visible literacy practices of boys, despite evidence that at least two girls in Connors' language arts class were accomplished athletes and avid sports fans. Sociologists have long discussed how sports operates as a "male preserve," a social practice that serves to reproduce and maintain society's larger gender inequities by providing women fewer

opportunities for sports participation, leadership and media coverage than are accorded

men, despite legislative efforts such as Title IX to address such inequities and despite

evidence that women are as interested in sports as men are (Bryson, 1987; Costa, 2003;

Dunning, 1986; Theberge, 1985). Wenner (1998) argues that sports spaces, such as sports

bars and other venues where men gather to view or talk about sports, serve as "segregated

sites of 'male solidarity' where men can 'rehearse' their identification with other men"

(p. 310). Indeed, Fine (1987) observed in his ethnographic account of middle school age

Little League baseball teams that while boys enjoyed the attention of girl spectators, they

never acknowledged girls' presence at their games, and that through participation in and

talk about sports with other boys, players simultaneously forged peer and gender

identities. Cross-gender friendships were not uncommon among the boys Fine studied,

but they were restricted to relationships marked by either romance or mutual teasing.

Cordial friendships based on common interests, such as sports, were not observed.

Literacy events structured around sports in Connors' class were indeed a male preserve,

and while neither Connors nor the boys in his classes were ever observed trying to

enforce such a gender regime on the girls in the class, they did nothing to disrupt it. Girls

like SpongeBob and Ciera S. were neither actively discouraged from nor encouraged to

bring their basketball passions into the community of learners that Connors attempted to

nurture through his permeable classroom. Nevertheless, this important aspect of these

girls' personal identities remained invisible within virtually all academic contexts,

flourishing almost exclusively as an unrecognized extracurricular pursuit.

Despite Connors' openness to his students' vernacular literacy practices, it is in

the gendered nature of sports discourse among the visible literacy practices enacted in his

classroom that the above warning about the need to explicitly recognize the materials that children and adolescents bring in their "virtual school bags" (Nixon & Comber, p. 129) must be heeded. It is not enough to simply make the classroom permeable to adolescents' vernacular literacy practices and then watch what pours in. The teacher in such a classroom must be actively engaged with the texts and contexts of each student's vernacular literacies. The teacher in a permeable classroom must *educate* (from the Latin *educare*, meaning "to draw out") in the truest sense of the word, taking an active interest in the students' vernacular literacies and funds of knowledge and drawing out those literacies upon which students' further development can be most compellingly scaffolded (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992). A truly educative experience is one that thoughtfully recognizes where individual learners stand, then transforms them in such a way that broadens their minds and spirits to new experiences and knowledge and enables future learning. This is an ideal to which Ed Connors aspired in creating his permeable classroom. However, as the missed opportunities to engage these girls' sports literacies or to fully integrate transmediation into the curriculum suggest, this ideal remained unfulfilled.

The Teacher – Negotiator of Literacy Events and Practices

Social Engagement in Theory

When asked to describe his own reading habits, Ed Connors notes that he had never been a big reader of fiction. He admits that as an adolescent, he disliked reading for academic purposes, but that he was a "voracious reader" of informational texts that he was able to self-select. Even as an adult, Connors says, "I like to read what I like to read. I don't really like it when people give me books to read. It's too schoolish." While he still

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does not read much fiction, he is an avid collector of "teacher books," and in those books, he says that in recent years he has noted "a trend toward a Reader's Workshop approach over whole class novel approaches," a recommendation that conveniently dovetails with his own feelings about being assigned books to read. His favorite teacher book is Laura Robb's *Teaching Reading in the Middle School* (2000), a book that Franzak (2006) highlights in her review of current paradigms in adolescent literacy instruction as a "hybrid" between reader response and strategic reading approaches "that combines a reading workshop (thereby meeting the need for choice) with focused instruction on reading strategies" (p. 216). As described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, Connors' language arts curriculum clearly bears the imprimatur of Robb's influence, from his commitment to maximizing opportunities for student self-selection of personally interesting texts to his use of the *Daybook of Critical Reading and Writing* (Claggett, Reid & Vinz, 1999) as a launch pad for reading comprehension strategy instruction. Connors' own "hybrid" approach was to use students' self-selected texts as vehicles for scaffolding students' development in key comprehension strategies such as visualization, drawing personal and intertextual connections, making inferences, and summarizing main and supporting details.

Prior to this study during the 2003-2004 school year, I had a number of opportunities to informally observe Connors' teaching both firsthand and vicariously through the experiences of my sixth grade daughter. What I saw were student work tables arranged into small clusters, daily DEAR sessions that began with mostly quiet (sometimes shared) reading and culminated in lively conversations among peers and between Connors and his students, and frequent challenges to students to exercise newly

learned reading strategies in their reading of their self-selected texts. Not only did this structure closely match the Reader's Workshop approach advocated by Robb and other adolescent literacy advocates, it allowed Connors to execute his teaching in a consultative manner, simultaneously helping individual students more effectively engage with their favored reading materials while guiding readers toward engagement with increasingly difficult text. Connors described his strategy toward guiding his students' book choices as one of "webbing" children's reading interests. For instance, suppose a student enjoyed reading *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Connors would attempt to determine what aspects of the series captivated the child's interest, then suggest a different title that might have a similar appeal to the individual:

> This is about children who have to overcome something. Here is another book, totally unrelated to the *Series of Unfortunate Events*, that deals with the same thing. And gradually, like we're doing with writing, your reading interests expand. You can't just stick with horse books or *Series of Unfortunate Events* in upper grades, where the reading gets more complex.

Connors took a special interest in the reading habits of his male students and felt that, based on his understanding of best practices from his own professional reading, this kind of permeable classroom structure would afford him an excellent opportunity not only to directly support boys' development as skilled and engaged readers, but also to nurture a classroom community of readers. Such was the state of Connors' approach to teaching language arts when this study was designed, and Chapter 2 of this dissertation reviews the literature in support of the permeable classroom structure and pedagogical strategies that Connors adopted.

Social Disengagement in Practice

During the 2004-2005 school year, while Connors continued to articulate his vision of building a community of readers through a pedagogy that privileged student choice and direct instruction in a constellation of reading comprehension strategies that he believed were central to engaged reading, Connors modified both the physical layout and daily routines of his class from what they had been the previous year in order to address classroom management issues. As can be seen in Figures B12 through B15, student tables were no longer clustered into small groups, but rather set end-to-end in rows. Only once were the tables moved into groups, to facilitate a book club-style discussion over students' Book Project choices, which took place in the middle of the final grading period of the school year. Brief discussions between pairs of students seated at the same table frequently took place during language arts lessons, typically following the Think-Pair-Share format in response to a *Daybook* prompt. Instead of beginning and ending with text-based peer conversations, DEAR sessions during this school year usually began with a brief announcement that DEAR time was commencing, and ended with the whole class' attention directed toward the front of the room, where individual students would take turns reciting the schedule for the day. During DEAR time, not only did Connors rarely interact with students, students rarely interacted with each other, Tiger and Montel's occasional shared readings proving the exception to the rule. Only twice during the observation period did DEAR sessions end with volunteers sharing with the whole class what they had been reading. Ironically, while Connors continued to articulate the value of creating a community of readers, cooperative book club-type activities and text-centered social interactions were minimized in the enacted language arts curriculum.

Connors' more socially disengaged approach may help explain the overall drop in reading attitude scores, as detailed at the end of Chapter 4. While attitudes toward reading for academic purposes dropped significantly among all students over the course of the school year, a statistically significant decline in attitudes toward recreational reading was seen only among girls, while the decline observed among boys did not reach statistical significance. While not reported in the previous chapter, a comparison of the attitude toward recreational reading subscores between Connors' and his team-teacher Ms. Price's classrooms may provide additional insights into the overall portrait of student attitudes toward reading. As can be seen in Table A15, while attitudes toward recreational reading dropped among all students in both classes, only the drop among Connors' homeroom students was statistically significant.

What was different in Price's classroom? Even though she was not the designated language arts teacher, Price did build more socially engaged literacy practices into her classroom. While Connors read two novels aloud over the course of the year (*The Bad Beginning* and *Maniac Magee*), Price read six (*The Magician's Nephew, Warriors Don't Cry, Number the Stars, Jaguar, Joey Pigza Loses Control* and *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*). As shown in Figure B3 (see Chapter 3), Price maintained a reading corner, a small carpeted area with bean bag chairs and special lighting where students could spend DEAR time and which also included a reading recommendation wall, where students (and Ms. Price) routinely posted notecards with comments on books they had read. During the Genre Project, Connors started putting up Post-It notes with the names of books that students had read, but did not continue this after the first wave of student book reports were graded. While none of Price's classroom activities were observed in the

course of this study, these contrasts between the two teachers nonetheless suggest that Price implemented more routines to build a community of readers among her students than did Connors.

What this contrast in routines illustrates is that while Connors' ostensibly permeable language arts curriculum afforded visibility of the texts at the heart of many students' vernacular literacy practices, it was Price's class that afforded greater recognition of those texts. As Franzak (2006), Nixon and Comber (2006), Reeves (2004), and Alvermann and Hagood (2000) emphasize, creating classroom contexts that afford the visibility of students' vernacular literacy practices may help build a bridge between in- and out-of-school literacies, but only a "cursory acknowledgement" of those practices within academic contexts "shortchanges students' literacy knowledge" (Franzak, p. 224). These authors emphasize the importance of building close relationships with students to see texts through their eyes, "exploring with students the satisfactions these texts provide" (Reeves, p. 258). While Connors voiced a similar position in discussing the value of webbing students' reading habits, he did not consistently do this with his students. In fact, the only occasion on which Connors was observed discussing text selections with individual students was during the library visits to choose books for the Book Project. Even then, most interactions with students were restricted to the students telling Connors which book they wanted to read and Connors either approving the choice or suggesting that the student seek a different title.

This lack of close guidance of students' text selections as well as the lack of consistent, explicit recognition of a great number of the texts that students made visible within his classroom may have served as a counterweight to the permeable framework

that Connors tried to establish, resulting in an unintended level of impermeability that may have factored into the drop in reading attitude scores. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides a framework for understanding how that process might work. Connors' emphasis on student choice afforded students a sense of autonomy, and to the extent that students chose texts within their independent/instructional range, students' sense of competence was attended to by the classroom structure. However, the relative lack of recognition afforded students' visible text choices by Connors as well as the de-emphasis of class routines and activities in which students could engage socially with each other over their text selections may have worked against supporting students' sense of belonging while in Connors' classroom. Further, while a permeability to certain kinds of texts at the core of some students' vernacular literacy practices may have supported some students' sense of belonging, an impermeability (whether intentional or not) to other kinds of texts may have served to diminish that sense for other students.

Print-centrism and the Pedagogy of Control

As discussed above, this impermeability manifested itself most strongly in the near total invisibility of the texts of some girls' vernacular literacy practices within academic contexts, although boys were not immune, especially in terms of recognition of their non-print text selections. Noteworthy in this regard is Connors' response to the text selections that students made for the culminating activity on visualization skills. While students were encouraged to bring in any kind of text, all of the exercises in the culminating activity were focused entirely on the print, with no discussion of the multimodal aspects of many of the texts that students brought in. While it could be argued that since the purpose of the activity was to assess students' abilities to visualize

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from print, the teacher need not have felt obliged to address any other semiotic systems at play in the texts that students brought, completely ignoring the non-print aspects of the texts may send the message to students that those aspects are of lesser value. Considering the fact that these extralinguistic features are the very aspects of the selected texts that many students noted in their journals as being among their top reasons for favoring these texts in the first place, an exclusively print-centric approach to studying these texts undercuts the first purpose of a permeable classroom: to better understand what kinds of texts students engage with in their vernacular literacy practices and to scaffold academic literacy learning on those practices.

In their argument for an expanded notion of literacy that embraces multiple semiotic systems and acknowledges the multimodal and transmedial nature of many adolescents' vernacular literacy practices, King and O'Brien (2002) note that "print represents the essence of control in the classroom" (p. 42). At best, a permeability to just the print aspects of students' vernacular literacy practices may provide a limited perspective on those practices. Students might make strategic choices to explore the print media texts of their favorite mediascapes within such a classroom and reserve engagement with affiliated non-print media texts to extracurricular contexts. This is what Gatorade and Link did with *Star Wars* texts and what Tiger and Montel did with basketball-themed texts. At worst, however, a permeability that is exclusively print-centric or that fails to adequately recognize the funds of knowledge that students bring with them may ultimately result in an impermeable classroom, as the texts that students are most enthusiastic about engaging with are not allowed to become either visible or recognized. Students in this case might opt to make their entire vernacular literacy lives

invisible and instead "play school." This could partially explain why not even the print media manifestations of Ciera S. and SpongeBob's basketball fandom became visible in Connors' classroom.

Given the importance of non-print texts to a transmedial literacy experience, this relative impermeability to non-print texts means that the classroom was not just impermeable to certain kinds of texts at the heart of many students' vernacular literacy practices, but that it was to a certain extent impermeable to the practices themselves. In their provocative argument for considering the power of fashion in constructing compelling educational scenarios, Wong & Henriksen (in press) draw a distinction between the objects of fashion and the experience of fashion, noting that while many approaches to making classroom experiences relevant to the lives of young people embrace the former, few take the time to consider how the latter might be incorporated into learning activities to support engagement with academic literacies. That is, while a teacher might build a lesson around a book, movie, song or television program that is popular with his or her students, a failure to consider how students engage with such texts in their non-school lives may prove of limited motivational value in promoting engagement with academic learning. This is the conclusion drawn by Alvermann, Hagood and Huddleston (2004) when reflecting on ways to scaffold academic learning around students' interests in professional wrestling. Huddleston attempted to discover the elements of professional wrestling and the experience of watching it that most captivated a student with whom he was working, and was able to successfully scaffold the student's understanding of story grammar and the structure of Shakespearean tragedy by helping the student engage with canonical texts in a manner similar to the ways in which he

engaged with wrestling matches. Alvermann and Hagood, on the other hand, attempted to use students' knowledge base of professional wrestling as an on-ramp for a traditional reading and writing task, and were disappointed by the students' lack of engagement with and enthusiasm for the task. The authors conclude that shoehorning the texts of students' vernacular literacy practices into relatively traditional academic literacy tasks – pouring new wine into old casks – has less potential for promoting student engagement than an approach that honors and builds upon the ways in which students relate to those texts in their vernacular literacy lives. As Smith and Wilhelm (2002, 2006) argue, "it's not the text, but the context" that matters (p. 55), and they recommend reframing the study of classic literature by appealing to the ways that adolescents engage with pop cultural and vernacular texts in out-of-school contexts, pouring old wine into new casks, in effect. Connors' print-centric approach to language arts was permeable to a certain range of texts that were important to students' vernacular literacy practices, but by recognizing few of the multimodal and non-print texts that students engaged with in those practices as well as few of the ways in which students individually and socially negotiated meaning between multiple print and non-print texts, Connors' language arts curriculum was ultimately impermeable not just to some students' vernacular texts, but to many students' vernacular practices. To borrow Wong and Henriksen's terms, while some objects of fashion became visible in Connors' classroom, many students' experience of fashion did not, which may help account for the failure to see increases in students' attitudes toward reading for either academic or recreational purposes.

It should be emphasized that this impermeability was not a barrier intentionally placed by Connors to keep out students' vernacular literacies, although enacting an

unintended pedagogy of control may yield similar motivational results as an overt approach. Rather, the lack of recognition of students' transmedial literacy practices may be more the result of a lack of attention to media literacy in Connors' teacher education and professional development. Conspicuously absent from Robb's *Teaching Reading in Middle School,* Connors' "Bible" for language arts instruction, is any mention of teaching with multimodal texts or helping students develop media literacy skills, which could help explain why Connors dealt very little with non-print media in his curriculum. Indeed, as Flores-Koulish (2005) discovered, few teachers emerge from teacher education with an understanding of media literacy, let alone a conceptual framework for teaching it. Given the importance of transmediation in the vernacular literacy practices of the boys in this study, one clear implication for practice is that teacher education must do a better job of addressing the ways in which children and adults synthesize meaning in a multimodal, multitextual mediascape. Flores-Koulish's study provides a basic model curriculum for media literacy education for pre-service teachers, while the work of Ladislaus Semali (2000, 2002) has developed a detailed approach to teaching for transmediation in teacher education based on a critical literacy framework. Anstey and Bull (2006) and Kist (2005) provide additional models.

However, despite these calls for better media literacy education for teachers (and these calls are not new; Semali (2000) traces the history of media literacy advocacy back to the writings of McLuhan and Postman in the early 1960s), an informal survey of four of the most recent and heavily promoted teacher education textbooks for reading and language arts instruction reveals a continued print-centric emphasis. While Strickland, Galda and Cullinan (2004) include viewing and visually representing along with reading,

writing, listening and speaking among the six language arts, neither of these skills receives a full chapter treatment as do the other four, devoting only two pages of a chapter on content area literacy to advice on pre- and post-viewing discussion strategies for videos. Unrau's (2008) new text on content area reading and writing is rooted in a multiliteracies perspective and acknowledges the importance of non-print literacies, yet devotes fewer than four full pages (out of 480) to media literacy. Frey and Fisher's (2006) only reference to media literacy is in a figure presenting NCA Standards for Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy in K-12 Education (p. 216). Like the bulk of Unrau's text, Frey and Fisher devote their discussion solely to reading comprehension strategies with print media. Only Wiseman, Elish-Piper and Wiseman (2005) devote a full, substantial chapter (50 pages) to "Literacy and Visual Representation, Interpretation, and Evaluation," which addresses basic visual literacy (decoding visual symbols), visual literacy with picture books, computer technology, and multimedia (including television). While resources devoted exclusively to multiliteracies and media literacy are abundant (e.g., Anstey & Bull, 2006; Kist, 2005), unless pre-service teachers have an entire class dedicated to understanding media literacy (as Semali has implemented at Pennsylvania State University), the media literacy education they receive within the context of a larger language arts methods course is not likely to be extensive.

Conclusion

This study was designed to enrich our understanding of adolescent boys' extracurricular literacy practices, through a case study of a language arts classroom that was structured around providing students with maximum opportunities to self-select personally interesting texts. A great deal of diversity was found in the set of text

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selections made by boys and girls across academic and vernacular contexts. While few individual authors or titles could be singled out as "hits," some trends in genre were apparent. Among boys, the metagenres of imaginative fiction, which includes fantasy, science fiction, horror and supernatural thrillers, and sports, which includes sports fiction, biography, informational text, and reference works, were the most popular. For comparison, among girls, fantasy and realistic fiction were the most frequently selected genres. Boys' vernacular literacy practices were found to be transmedial in nature and were strongly implicated for many boys in their construction of a social identity. Boys were observed participating in affinity spaces, affiliating themselves with other boys through shared consumption of a variety of print and non-print media texts. While the classroom that was studied was intended to be permeable to the texts of students' vernacular literacy practices, it was found to be heavily print-centric, which in some cases afforded only a limited perspective on the full range of texts with which students engage in those literacy practices. Ultimately, boys were more likely than girls to take advantage of the permeability of the classroom to explore texts that strongly reflected their transmedial interests. Boys also tended to read and consume texts from a wider range of genres and of print and non-print media than were girls. Despite the openness of the classroom to students' vernacular literacy lives, there were significant drops in attitude toward reading for academic and recreational purposes over the course of the year. It is suggested that while students did make many of the texts of their vernacular literacies visible within the permeable classroom, the lack of recognition of those texts by the teacher as well as a general level of social disengagement in the classroom may be a factor in the declining attitude scores.

A chief limitation of the present study is an underrepresentation in the dataset of text selections of many non-book and non-print texts that played a role in students' vernacular literacy practices. It is recommended that future inquiries into students' multimedia literacy habits find ways to factor in those texts in such a way that children's engagement with them can be usefully compared to that of their other text selections. Another major limitation is the disconnect between the teacher's stated beliefs about building a community of readers in his classroom and the overall lack of social engagement among students and between teacher and students observed in the classroom. Thus an understanding of what a permeable classroom with a strong social component might reveal about adolescents' literacy practices and how it might affect students' attitudes toward reading for a variety of purposes remains incomplete.

This study enriches the literature of adolescent literacy by providing empirical support for theories of transmediation as a key feature of adolescent literacy, an exploration of the nexus between young adolescents' literacy practices and social identity construction, and an illustration of the strong diversity that exists across the textual landscape of young adolescents' vernacular literacy practices. Future directions for research include developing better ways to account for the non-print literacies in adolescents' lives and exploring explanations for how certain affinity spaces (such as sports) develop gendered boundaries. Implications for practice include a strong call for teachers to stay current on publications for young adults, to nurture closer relationships with students to better understand the nature and functions of their vernacular literacy practices, and to adopt an expanded understanding of literacy that encompasses both print and non-print semiotic systems. As Thursday Next, the intrepid hero of Jasper Fforde's

eponymous series of science fiction novels, observes "publishing these days doesn't

necessarily restrict books to being just books" (2007, p. 181). Neither should literacy

education.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Tables

Table A1

Median Household Income Distribution by District

	Ilium	Homestead	Birch Creek	State Average
Less than $15,000 (%)	24.0	14.5	11.3	18.1
$15,000-$29,999 (%)	21.0	16.2	14.5	18.6
$30,000-$49,999 (%)	19.4	18.1	16.4	18.0
$50,000-$74,999 (%)	13.9	15.1	14.3	14.0
$75,000-$99,999 (%)	9.2	12.9	14.0	11.3
$100,000-$149,999 (%)	10.8	19.5	24.3	16.2
$150,000 or More (%)	1.6	3.7	5.2	3.0

Source: Standard & Poor's, 2003

Table A2

Enrollment Distribution by Race/Ethnicity by District

	Ilium	Homestead	Birch Creek	State Average
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	5.1	5.2	0.5	
Black (%)	39.4	22.6	2.9	
Hispanic (%)	14.6	7.1	3.0	
Native American (%)	1.2	0.7	0.1	
White (%)	39.6	64.4	93.5	
Other (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	

Source: Standard & Poor's, 2003

Table A3

Text Selections by Gender and Context

	Boys	Girls	Totals
A – Independent Reading	12	23	35
A – DEAR Shared	21	7	28
A – DEAR Solitary	56	28	84
A – Genre Project	89	104	193
A – Book Project	22	24	46
A – Visualization Activity	19	21	40
V – Bookstore Browsing	15	23	38
V – Self-report Interest	23	16	39
V – Self-report Recreational	122	47	169
Totals	379	293	672

$\chi^2 (9, N = 672) = 47.13, p < 0.05, \Phi_C = 0.458434$
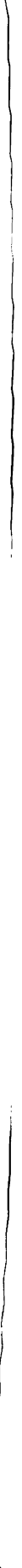
A =Academic context

V= Vernacular context

Table A4

Most Popular Texts Selected By All Students for Any Purpose, Based on Number of Text

Selections Documented for Each Text (in Parentheses)

(7) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the First: The Bad Beginning*

(7) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Sixth: The Ersatz Elevator*

(7) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Second: The Reptile Room*

(7) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Third: The Wide Window*

(6) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Fifth: The Austere*
    Academy

(6) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Eighth: The Hostile*
    Hospital

(6) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Fourth: The Miserable*
    Mill

(6) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Seventh: The Vile Village*

(6) JRR Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

(5) JK Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

(5) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book the Ninth: The Carnivorous*
    Carnival

(5) Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events,* unspecified volumes

(5) RL Stine, *Goosebumps,* unspecified volumes

(5) Heinrich Bauer North America, *J-14 Magazine*

(5) Time Inc. Magazine Company, *Sports Illustrated*

Table A5

Most Popular Authors Selected By All Students For Any Purpose, Based on Number of

Text Selections Documented for Each Author (in Parentheses)

(72) Lemony Snicket

(33) Jonathan Rand

(20) JK Rowling

(18) RL Stine

(11) Matt Christopher

(10) Roald Dahl

(9) Jack Gantos

(9) Gordon Korman

(9) JRR Tolkien

(7) Dav Pilkey

(7) Time Inc. Magazine Company

(6) Eoin Colfer

(6) CS Lewis

(5) Beverly Cleary

(5) Electronic Arts

(5) Heinrich Bauer North America

(5) Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

(5) Louis Sachar

(5) Jude Watson

Table A6

Distribution of Focal Students' Text Selections by Genre, Gender and Academic/Vernacular Context

	Boy Vernacular	Boy Academic	Girl Vernacular	Girl Academic	Totals
Action	16	0	0	0	**16**
Animals	2	3	2	5	**12**
Automotive	4	0	0	0	**4**
Bible/Inspirational	0	3	0	1	**4**
Biography	1	10	3	15	**29**
Comedy	7	1	0	0	**8**
Comic Book	4	3	1	0	**8**
Fantasy	49	24	36	44	**153**
Gaming	2	3	0	0	**5**
General Non-Fiction	5	1	2	4	**12**
Historical Fiction	3	13	3	11	**30**
History	1	1	0	0	**2**
Multiple Genres	0	0	1	0	**1**
Mystery/Thriller	15	16	3	5	**39**
Poetry	0	0	0	1	**1**
Popular Culture	0	0	2	3	**5**
Realistic Fiction	16	21	29	22	**88**
Reality/Simulation	5	0	0	0	**5**
Reference	5	0	0	1	**6**
Science Fiction	12	8	2	3	**25**
Sports	13	19	2	2	**36**
Totals	**160**	**126**	**86**	**117**	**489**

$\chi^2(60, N = 489) = 194.2599, p < 0.05, \Phi_c = 0.36$

Table A7

Fog Readability Levels of Focal Students' Text Selections by Gender and

Academic/Vernacular Context

	Boy Vernacular	Boy Academic	Girl Vernacular	Girl Academic
Mean	8.29	6.91	7.63	7.89
Standard Deviation	1.98	1.64	1.80	1.71
N	60	69	60	76

T-test Comparisons (two-sample assuming equal variances)

Boy Vernacular to Boy Academic: $t(127) = 4.33, p < 0.05, d = 0.76$

Girl Vernacular to Girl Academic: $t(134) = -0.87, p > 0.05, d = -0.15$

Table A8

Flesch-Kincaid Readability Levels of Focal Students' Text Selections by Gender and

Academic/Vernacular Context

	Boy Vernacular	Boy Academic	Girl Vernacular	Girl Academic
Mean	6.11	5.02	5.82	6.00
Standard Deviation	1.78	1.33	1.47	1.40
N	80	72	67	81

T-test Comparisons (two-sample assuming equal variances)

Boy Academic to Boy Vernacular: $t(150) = 4.28$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.69$

Girl Academic to Girl Vernacular: $t(146) = -0.76$, $p > 0.05$, $d = -0.13$

Table A9

Distribution of Focal Students' Text Selections by Medium, Gender and

Academic/Vernacular Context

	Boy Vernacular	Boy Academic	Girl Vernacular	Girl Academic	**Totals**
Book	103	117	81	111	**412**
Game	19	0	0	1	**20**
Magazine	6	8	2	4	**20**
Movie/Video	21	1	3	0	**25**
Short Story	0	0	0	1	**1**
TV Show	11	0	0	0	**11**
Totals	**160**	**126**	**86**	**117**	**489**

$\chi^2(15, N = 489) = 105.87$, $p < 0.05$, $\Phi_C = 0.27$

Table A10

Distribution of Focal Students' Text Selections by Series, Gender and

Academic/Vernacular Context

	Boy Vernacular	Boy Academic	Girl Vernacular	Girl Academic	Totals
Series	102	55	50	62	269
Non-Series	58	71	36	55	220
Totals	160	126	86	117	489

$\chi^2 (3, N = 489) = 12.04, p < 0.05, \Phi_c = 0.16$

Table A11

ERAS Recreational and Academic Subscale Comparisons by Gender, Fall 2004

ERAS Recreational Subscale, Fall 2004

	Girls	Boys
Mean	31.75	27.13
Standard Deviation	5.87	6.64
N	17	19

t(34) = 2.20, p < 0.05, d = 0.74

ERAS Academic Subscale, Fall 2004

	Girls	Boys
Mean	29	27.71
Standard Deviation	5.63	6.77
N	17	19

t(34) = 0.62, p > 0.05, d = 0.21

Table A12

ERAS Recreational and Academic Subscale Comparisons by Gender, Spring 2005

ERAS Recreational Subscale, Spring 2005

	Girls	Boys
Mean	29.77	24.95
Standard Deviation	6.31	5.77
N	17	19

t(34) = 2.40, p < 0.05, d = 0.80

ERAS Academic Subscale, Spring 2005

	Girls	Boys
Mean	26.15	24.37
Standard Deviation	5.11	5.62
N	17	19

t(34) = 0.93, p > 0.05, d = 0.33

Table A13

Fall/Spring ERAS Recreational Subscale Comparisons by Gender

ERAS Recreational Subscale, Girls

	Fall	Spring
Mean	31.75	29.77
Standard Deviation	5.87	6.31
N	17	17

t(16) = 1.77, p < 0.05, d = 0.32

ERAS Recreational Subscale, Boys

	Fall	Spring
Mean	27.13	24.95
Standard Deviation	6.64	5.77
N	19	19

t(18) = 1.32, p > 0.05, d = 0.35

Table A14

Fall/Spring ERAS Academic Subscale Comparisons by Gender

ERAS Academic Subscale, Girls

	Fall	Spring
Mean	29	26.15
Standard Deviation	5.63	5.83
N	17	17

t(16) = 2.73, p < 0.05, d = 0.50

ERAS Academic Subscale, Boys

	Fall	Spring
Mean	27.71	24.37
Standard Deviation	6.77	5.62
N	19	19

t(18) = 2.26, p < 0.05, d = 0.54

Table A15

Fall/Spring ERAS Recreational Subscale Comparisons by Homeroom

ERAS Recreational Subscale, Connors, by administration

	Fall	Spring
Mean	29.81	25.94
Standard Deviation	5.69	6.09
N	16	16

t(15) = 3.13, p < 0.05, d = 0.66

ERAS Recreational Subscale, Price, by administration

	Fall	Spring
Mean	28.91	28.26
Standard Deviation	7.41	6.65
N	20	20

t(19) = 0.44, p > 0.05, d = 0.09

Figures

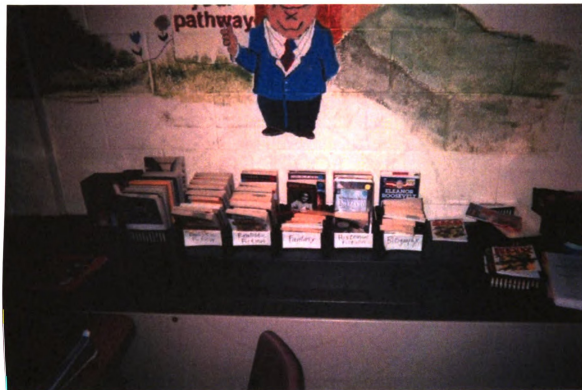Figure B1

Classroom library of Mr. Ed Connors

Figure B2

Classroom library of Ms. Julie Price

Figure B3

Reading corner in Ms. Julie Price's classroom

Figure B4

Visualization quiz administered by Mr. Connors

<u>Danny the Champion of the World</u>
<u>Visualization Quiz</u>

from Daybook

1) What day of the week did Danny and his father fly the kite?

2) Where did they get the string to fly the kite?

3) Where did they release the kite?

4) What was the kite made of?

5) How long did the kite stay up in the air?

Figure B5

Genre Project assignment sheet

Genre Book Reviews

A genre is a type of book. The following are different genres of books: realistic fiction, science fiction, historical fiction, biography, and fantasy. Below are a description of each genre.

Realistic Fiction: The story happens now, it is not true, and it could happen.

Science Fiction: The story happens in the future, it is not true, and it includes futuristic technology.

Historical Fiction: The story happened at least 25 years ago, it is not true, and it could have happened.

Biography: This story is true and is written by an author about another person.

Fantasy: The story could happen at anytime, it is not true, it often includes magic and special powers.

For the second marking term each student is expected to read one book from each genre. Each book must be at least 100 pages except for the biography which must be at least 60 pages. When the student has finished reading their book, they must complete a genre book review form. All forms will be due Friday February 18. The grading will be as follows: 100%= 5 books, 90% = 4 books, 80%= 3 books, 70% = 2 books, 60% = 1 book, 0%= 0 books.

Figure B6

Sample book review form for all genres except biography, completed by Ciera S., a focal

student

(A)

L.A.

Name:
Book: Lily's crossin
Genre: Historical Fiction
Pages: 180
Date: 11-16-04

Book Review

1) What was the main setting of the story? (Time and Place the story happened) It happened during World War 2 in

St. Albans and Rockaway beach.

2) Please list five major events from the story.

1) Lily and her grandma were on their way to Rockaway Beach 2) the Lily's did come to send them off.

3) Margret Lily's friend leaves and moves somewhere else until the war is over 4) The next door neighbors have a guest friend named Albert. 5) Albert and Lily

3) What was the big problem the main character/ characters were trying to solve? Lily was trying to send Margret her picture of her brother because she couldn't remember his face. The second thing Lily was trying to do was help Albert get over the sea to find this sister.

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Figure B7

Continued from Figure B6, back side of sample book review form

4) How was the problem solved? The first problem was solved ~~&~~ after Lily left Rockaway beach to go back to school Ruth was sent over to her brother ~~&~~ The second problem was solved when Albert ~~gave~~ gave $ Lily some money to pay for it to be mailed.

5) List five connections that you had to the story.

1.) Lily really liked reading and so do I.

2.) Lily taught Albert how to swim and I help people at school.

3.) Lily likes to play the piano and I remembered when I played the piano

4.) Lily went to a catholic school 5. did my mom.

5./ when Albert's parents wrote a newspaper that had to secret it was like stuff when number of stuff they read secret pages.

6) Rate the book 1-10 and explain what you liked about it and tell one thing that could have made the story better.

I rate this ~~book~~ book about a 10 because it told about a girl my age and what happened in her big lifetime. It was full of many details also. There's nothing I could add to the story.

Figure B8

Sample book review form for biographies, completed by Ciera S., a focal student

Name
Book: Martin Luther King Jr.
Genre: Biography
Pages: 108
Date: 1-30-05   LA.

1) Please list five interesting things about the person.

1) that Martin's Playmate was white

2) Martin held a boycott of the buses even though he
3) He still did what he thought was right even though he
knew he would go to jail.
4) He helped blacks to be able to vote
5) He was killed outside his motel room.

2) Please list three connections that you have to the person.

1) Some of my family lives in Alabama
2) .... Martin Luther King like the world might with the
same
3) I stand up for what I believe in to

he did

3) Please rate the biography from 1-10 and explain why you gave
it that score. I would rate it a 10 because
it really told a lot about his life and
what he accomplished during his life.

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Figure B9

Book Project assignment sheet

Book Project
Due May 12

1) The book must be at least 150 pages long. I will give extra points if the book is over 250 pages or is historical fiction or science fiction.

2) Must be done on a poster board.

3) The poster must have the title, author, and genre.

4) The poster must also include sections on main character traits, main setting, main events in the story, problem, resolution, theme, and a review where you rate the story from 1-10 and explain why you gave it that score.

5) The poster also needs to include the following sections: 5 personal connections, 3 questions that you had while you were reading, and 2 sketches of different events.

Figure B10

Timeline of classroom activities, data sources (with associated research questions) and

data analysis strategies employed in study

Timeline	Classroom Activities	Data Sources (RQs)	Data Analysis
First Trimester (8/04 – 11/04)	- Teacher administers ERAS - Independent Reading Logs & DEAR time - Modeling aesthetic responses with *Daybook* activities	- Informal interviews with teacher	- Proposal writing/revision & literature review
Second Trimester (11/04 – 3/05)	- Genre Project & DEAR time - Literature circles with Genre Project choices - Modeling aesthetic responses with *Maniac Magee*	- Archival data: Gates-McGinitie, ERAS (4) Genre Project book reports (2, 3) - Classroom observations (2) - Student interviews: Round 1 - MRP (1, 2, 3) Round 2 - follow-up on MRP, review Genre Project reports (1, 2, 3) - Ongoing interviews with teacher	- Constant-comparative w/ interview transcripts & field notes from class observations - Genre & reading level analyses of texts chosen in 1st & 2nd trimesters - Statistical analyses of archival data
Third Trimester (3/05 – 6/05)	- Book Project - DEAR time - Teacher administers ERAS	- Classroom observations (2) - Bookstore browsing activity & follow-up interview(1, 2, 3) - Follow-up ERAS (4) - Ongoing interviews with teacher	- Constant-comparative w/ interview transcripts & field notes from class observations - Genre & reading level analyses of texts chosen in 2nd & 3rd trimesters, & in bookstore browsing

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Figure B11

Text Selections of All Students by Age of Text (Base Year 2005)
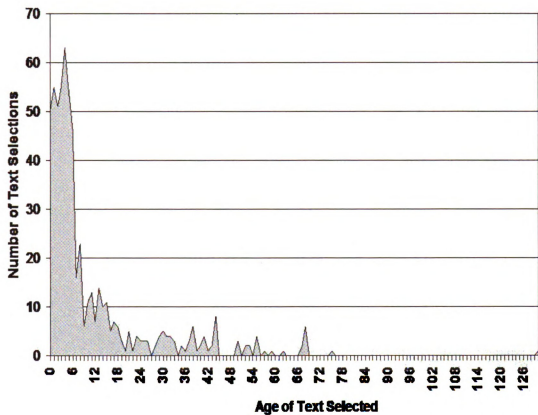
Figure B12

Mr. Connors' classroom during gym class, after DEAR

Figure B13

Second view of Mr. Connors' classroom during gym class, after DEAR
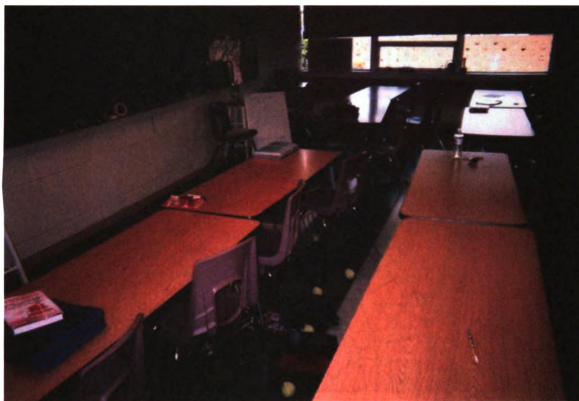
Figure B14

Third view of Mr. Connors' classroom during gym class, after DEAR

Figure B15

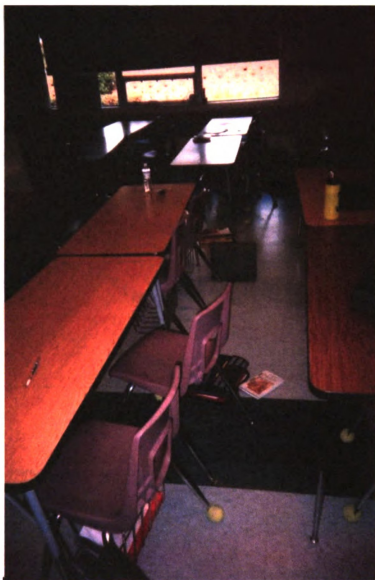*Fourth view of Mr. Connors' classroom during gym class, after DEAR*

Figure B16

The Long Tail

The New Marketplace

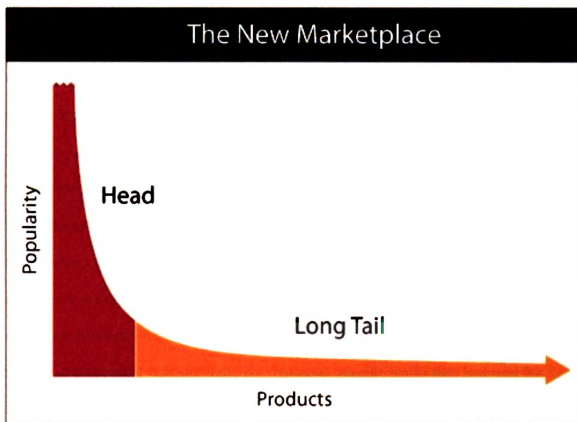Head

Long Tail

Popularity

Products

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APPENDIX C

List of Texts Selected by Medium and Title

The 672 text selections documented in this study represent 472 unique texts, 368 of which were selected by only one student (accounting for 368 text selections), 59 by two students (118 text selections), 22 by three students (66 text selections), 8 by four students (32 text selections), 6 by five students (30 text selections), 5 by six students (30 text selections), and 4 by seven students (28 text selections). This appendix lists all of the texts selected by students for which a specific title was documented. Forty-eight unique texts are not represented on this list, due to incomplete title information provided by students. For example, a number of students on Genre Project book report forms identified the books they had read by series names, rather than by the books' particular titles, and some focal students could not remember specific books they had read for recreational reading or Independent Reading assignments, but could remember the series from which books came (e.g., *Goosebumps*) or topics about which books were written (e.g., Tony Hawk biography). While as much information as possible about those 48 texts is included in the overall database of 672 text selections, only the 424 unique texts for which complete author and title information was available are included in this appendix.

The list below is organized first by medium (i.e., Books, Magazines and Comic Books, Motion Pictures and DVDs, Television Programs, and Video Games), then alphabetically by title. Authors, publishers and production companies are presented where available, and numbers in parentheses indicate the number of students who selected a particular text. Entries on the list without parentheses were selected by one student.

The A to Z Encyclopedia of Serial Killers, Harold Schechter

Achingly Alice, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

The Adventures of Captain Underpants, Dav Pilkey (4)

After the Rain: Virginia's Civil War Diary, Mary Pope Osborne

Al Capone Does My Shirts, Gennifer Choldenko (2)

Alice Alone, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Alien Androids Assault Arizona, Jonathan Rand (2)

Aliens Attack Alpena, Jonathan Rand

All-American Girl, Meg Cabot

Amelia's Notebook, Marissa Moss

Amulet of Doom, Bruce Coville

Anastasia: The Last Grand Duchess, Russia, 1914, Carolyn Meyer

Ancient Egypt, George Hart

Animal Farm, George Orwell

Anna Sunday, Sally Keehn

Are You There God? It's Me Margaret, Judy Blume

Artemis Fowl, Eoin Colfer (2)

Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident, Eoin Colfer

Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code, Eoin Colfer

The Austere Academy, Lemony Snicket (6)

Backward Bird Dog, Bill Wallace

The Bad Beginning, Lemony Snicket (7)

Baseball Fever, Johanna Hurwitz

The Basket Counts, Matt Christopher

Basketball (Or Something Like It), Nora Raleigh Baskin

Be More Chill, Ned Vizzini

The Beast, R.L. Stine

The Beasties, William Sleator

Beetles, Lightly Toasted, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Beyond the Deepwoods, Paul Stewart & Chris Riddell

Big Ben, Jenny Dale

Black Like Me, John Howard Griffin

Blackwater Swamp, Bill Wallace

Blister, Susan Shreve (2)

Boltzmon!, William Sleator

The Boxcar Children, Gertrude Chandler Warner

The Boys From Kalamazoo, T.J. Johnston

Broken Date, R.L. Stine

Bud, Not Buddy, Christopher Paul Curtis

Captain Underpants and the Big Bad Battle of the Bionic Booger Boy, Part 1: Night of the Nasty Nostril Nuggets, Dav Pilkey

Captain Underpants and the Wrath of the Wicked Wedgie Woman, Dav Pilkey (2)

The Carnivorous Carnival, Lemony Snicket (5)

Cartoons and Cartooning, Harvey Weiss

The Case of the Phantom Frog, Edmund Wallace Hildick

The Championship Tradition Continues: 2003-2004 MSU Basketball Media Guide, Michigan State University Athletic Department

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Roald Dahl (2)

Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator, Roald Dahl

Charlie Bone and the Time Twister, Jenny Nimmo

Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul, Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen

Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul, Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen

Chicken, Chicken, R.L. Stine

The Chocolate Touch, Patrick Skene Catling

A Cinderella Story, Robin Wasserman (2)

Cinderella 2000, Mavis Jukes

Class Trip to the Cave of Doom, Kate McMullan & Bill Basso

Cleopatra VII: Daughter of the Nile, Egypt, 57 B.C., Kristiana Gregory

The Climb, Gordon Korman

Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen, Dyan Sheldon

The Contest, Gordon Korman (4)

Conversations with J.K. Rowling, Lindsey Fraser

The Counterfeit Tackle, Matt Christopher

Creepy Condors of California, Jonathan Rand

Crews, Maria Hinojosa (3)

The Cricket in Times Square, George Selden

The Crow, J. O'Barr

A Dangerous Promise, Joan Lowery Nixon

Danny Champion of the World, Roald Dahl

The Dark Horse, Marcus Sedgwick

Dark Rival, Jude Watson

Dear Napoleon, I Know You're Dead But ..., Elvira Woodruff

The Diamond Champs, Matt Christopher

A Different Season, David Klass (2)

Dinosaurs Destroy Detroit, Jonathan Rand (2)

Dirt Bike Runaway, Matt Christopher

The Disappearing Bike Shop, Elvira Woodruff

Dog, Juliet Clutton-Brock

The Doll People, Ann Martin & Laura Godwin

Don't Ever Get Sick at Granny's, R.L. Stine & Jahnna Malcolm

Don't Get Caught Driving the School Bus, Todd Strasser

Don't Get Caught In the Teachers' Lounge, Todd Strasser (2)

Dork in Disguise, Carol Gorman (3)

Double Fudge, Judy Blume

Double Trouble, Jenny Dale

Dove Song, Kristine Franklin

Dracula Doesn't Rock and Roll, Debbie Dadey

Dragon: Hound of Honor, Julie Andrews Edwards

The Eagle's Shadow, Nora Martin

Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time, Brian Tracy

Eleanor Roosevelt, Rachel Toor

Eleanor Roosevelt, Shannon Donnelly

Electronic Truth or Dare, Scholastic

Ella Enchanted, Gail Carson Levine

Eragon, Christopher Paolini

The Ersatz Elevator, Lemony Snicket (7)

Escape, Gordon Korman

The Everyday Witch: A Tale of Magic and High Adventure, Sandra Forrester

Everything on a Waffle, Polly Horvath

Eyeballs for Lunch, Margaret Ragz

The Face on the Milk Carton, Caroline Cooney

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, J.K. Rowling

Fear Games, R.L. Stine

Fever 1793, Laurie Halse Anderson

The Field Guide, Holly Black & Tony DiTerlizzi

Five Alien Elves, Gregory Maguire

Football Fugitive, Matt Christopher

For Love of the Game: My Story, Michael Jordan & Mark Vancil (3)

Francie, Karen English (2)

Frederick Douglass Fights for Freedom, Margaret Davidson

Free at Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle, Sara Bullard & Julian Bond (2)

Frindle, Andrew Clements (2)

George Lucas, Dana White

George's Marvelous Medicine, Roald Dahl (2)

A Ghost in the Family, Betty Ren Wright

Ghost Song, Susan Price

Ghosts Beneath Our Feet, Betty Ren Wright

Girls in Pants: The Third Summer of the Sisterhood, Ann Brashares (2)

The Giver, Lois Lowry (3)

Go Free or Die: A Story About Harriet Tubman, Jeri Ferris & Karen Ritz

Good Burger, Joseph Locke

Goodbye, Vietnam, Gloria Whelan (3)

Goosed!, Bill Wallace

The Great Quarterback Switch, Matt Christopher

The Grim Grotto, Lemony Snicket (3)

Guinness Book of World Records 2004, Guinness World Records (2)

Guinness Book of World Records 2005, Guinness World Records

Harriet the Spy, Louise Fitzhugh

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, J.K. Rowling (3)

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, J.K. Rowling (3)

Harry Potter & the Order of the Phoenix, J.K. Rowling (3)

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, J.K. Rowling (4)

Harry Potter and the Sorceror's Stone, J.K. Rowling (5)

Hatchet, Gary Paulsen (2)

Help! I'm Trapped in My Teacher's Body, Todd Strasser

Henry Huggins, Beverly Cleary

Hidden Past, Jude Watson

Hidden Talents, David Lubar

The History of the Philadelphia 76ers, Michael Goodman

Hit and Run, R.L. Stine

Holes, Louis Sachar

Holy Enchilada, Henry Winkler (4)

Hoot, Carl Hiassen (3)

The Hobbit, J.R.R. Tolkien (6)

The Hostile Hospital, Lemony Snicket (6)

The Hot and Cold Summer, Johanna Hurwitz

How I Survived Fifth Grade, Megan Stine & H. William Stine

How to Eat Fried Worms, Thomas Rockwell (2)

I Am Regina, Sally Keehn

Ice Run, Steve Hamilton

IceFire, Chris D'Lacey

If Pigs Could Fly ... and Other Deep Thoughts, Bruce Lansky & Stephen Carpenter

In the Doghouse, Lisa Banim

In the Land of the Lawn Weenies, David Lubar (3)

Inkheart, Cornelia Funke (2)

Inside Monster Garage: The Builds, The Skills, The Thrills, Dan Rosenberg

Invisible Iguanas of Illinois, Jonathan Rand

Ironman, Chris Crutcher

Island of the Aunts, Eva Ibbotson

Island of the Blue Dolphins, Scott O'Dell

Jaguar, Roland Smith

Jakarta Missing, Jane Kurtz

James and the Giant Peach, Roald Dahl (4)

Jane Goodall: Animal Behaviorist and Writer, Brendan January

Jennifer Murdley's Toad, Bruce Coville

Joey Pigza Loses Control, Jack Gantos (3)

Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key, Jack Gantos (2)

Johnny Long Legs, Matt Christopher

Johnny Tremain, Esther Forbes

Joshua's Song, Joan Hiatt Harlow

Kid Biz, Scholastic

Kids' Devotional Bible, Joanne Dejonge, Connie Neal & Lori Walburg

King's Fifth, Scott O'Dell

Knights Don't Teach Piano, Debbie Dadey

Kreepy Klowns of Kalamazoo, Jonathan Rand (2)

Larry Bird, Mark Beyer

Last Shot, John Feinstein

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker Official Strategy Guide, Bryan Stratton and
    Stephen Stratton

Lemony Snicket: The Unauthorized Autobiography, Lemony Snicket

Letters from a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs, Mary Lyons

Lily's Crossing, Patricia Reilly Giff

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, C.S. Lewis (3)

Little House on the Prairie, Laura Ingalls Wilder

Loch, Paul Zindel

The Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien (3)

Loser, Jerry Spinelli (2)

Lucinda's Secret, Holly Black & Tony DiTerlizzi

Mad Game: The NBA Education of Kobe Bryant, Roland Lazenby

Madden NFL 2005: Prima Official Game Guide, Prima Games

Magic Johnson: Champion with a Cause, Keith Elliot Greenberg (3)

The Magician's Nephew, C.S. Lewis (3)

Maniac Magee, Jerry Spinelli

Mariah Keeps Cool, Mildred Pitts Walter (2)

Marlfox, Brian Jacques

Martin Luther King, Jr.: Minister and Civil Rights Activist, Brendan January

Mattimeo, Brian Jacques

The Mayflower Project, Katherine Applegate

Mayhem on Mackinac Island, Jonathan Rand (2)

It's a Dog's Life, Bob Balaban

Michelle Kwan, Sam Wellman

Michelle Kwan, Sherry Beck Paprocki

Michigan Mega-Monsters, Jonathan Rand (2)

Midnight for Charlie Bone, Jenny Nimmo

The Midnight Fox, Betsy Byars

Million Dollar Shot, Dan Gutman

Miracle at the Plate, Matt Christopher

The Miserable Mill, Lemony Snicket (6)

Missouri Madhouse, Jonathan Rand (3)

Misty of Chincoteague, Marguerite Henry

Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism, Georgia Byng

Monster Nation: The Best Transformed Vehicles from Coast to Coast, Dan Rosenberg

The Monsters of Morley Manor, Bruce Coville

Mouse Rap, Walter Dean Myers

Mr. Popper's Penguins, Richard & Florence Atwater

My Brother Sam Is Dead, James Lincoln Collier (3)

Mythmaker: The Story of J.K. Rowling, Charles Shields

Myths and Monsters, DK Publishing

Nebraska Nightcrawlers, Jonathan Rand (2)

New Kid at School, Kate McMullan

New York Ninjas, Jonathan Rand

Nice Girls Finish First: The Remarkable Story of Notre Dame's Rise to the Top of Women's College Basketball, Mark Bradford

Nightmare on Planet X, A.G. Cascone (2)

No More Broken Promises, Angela Elwell Hunt

Nobody Was Here: 7th Grade in the Life of Me, Penelope, Alison Pollet (2)

Number the Stars, Lois Lowry

The Official Guide to Battlebots, Dan Danko & Tom Mason

Ogres of Ohio, Jonathan Rand

The Penultimate Peril, Lemony Snicket

The Phantom Tollbooth, Norton Juster

Pilot Down, Presumed Dead, Marjorie Phleger

The Pity Party: 8th Grade in the Life of Me, Cass, Alison Pollet

Playing with Fire, Peter Robinson

Poisonous Pythons Paralyze Pennsylvania, Jonathan Rand (2)

Pokemon Ruby & Sapphire: Prima's Official Strategy Guide, Elizabeth Hollinger

Poltergeists of Petoskey, Jonathan Rand

Princess in Training, Meg Cabot

The Pushcart War, Jean Merrill

Quadehar the Sorcerer, Erik L'Homme

Quidditch Through the Ages, J.K. Rowling

Racing the Past, Sis Deans

Ralph S. Mouse, Beverly Cleary (2)

Ramona the Brave, Beverly Cleary

Reach For the Stars, Anne Mazer

The Rebounder, Thomas Dygard

Redwall, Brian Jacques

The Reptile Room, Lemony Snicket (7)

Revenge of the Dragon Lady, Kate McMullan

Rich Dad Poor Dad, Robert Kiyosaki & Sharon Lechter

Riddle of the Prairie Bride, Kathryn Reiss

The Right Way to Win: How Athletes Can Place God First in Their Hearts, Mike Blaylock (2)

Rising Force, Dave Wolverton (2)

Rodents of the World, David Alderton & Bruce Tanner

The Secret of the Old Clock, Carolyn Keene

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Mildred Taylor (2)

The Rough Guide to Skiing and Snowboarding in North America, Tam Leach, Stephen Timblin & Christian Williams

Runaway to Freedom, Barbara Smucker (2)

Sahara Special, Esme Codell

Say Cheese and Die!, R.L. Stine

Scared Stiff, Willo Davis Roberts

Scholastic Book of World Records 2005, Jenifer Morse

Scorpions, Walter Dean Myers

Scott Joplin, Katherine Preston

The Secret Window, Betty Ren Wright

The Seeing Stone, Holly Black & Tony DiTerlizzi

Shadrach, Meindert De Jong

Shiloh, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Shipwreck, Gordon Korman

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, Ann Brashares (2)

Sixth Grade Can Really Kill You, Barthe DeClements

Sleepwalker, R.L. Stine

The Slippery Slope, Lemony Snicket (4)

Snow Bound, Harry Mazer

Snow Dog, Jim Kjelgaard

The Snowman, R.L. Stine

Socks, Beverly Cleary

Sounder, William Armstrong

South Carolina Sea Creatures, Jonathan Rand

Spellbinder: The Life of Harry Houdini, Tom Lalicki (2)

Sports Great Nolan Ryan, William Lace

Sports Illustrated for Kids Year in Sports 2005, SI for Kids

Sports Illustrated: Almanac 2005, Editors of Sports Illustrated

Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace (Jr Novelization), Patricia Wrede

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith, Matthew Stover

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith (Jr Novelization), Patricia Wrede (2)

Star Wars Jedi Apprentice: Deceptions, Jude Watson

Star Wars: Boba Fett: The Fight to Survive, Terry Bisson & Peter Bolinger

Star Wars: Legacy of the Jedi, Jude Watson

Star Wars: Secrets of the Jedi, Jude Watson

Stone Fox, John Reynolds Gardiner

Stonewords: A Ghost Story, Pam Conrad

Strange But True Auto Racing Stories, Al Powell

The Summer I Shrank My Grandmother, Elvira Woodruff

The Summit, Gordon Korman

Sunday's Heroes: NFL Legends Talk About the Times of Their Lives, Richard Whittingham, Mike Ditka, Paul Hornung, & Pat Summerall (2)

The Supernaturalist, Eoin Colfer

Survival, Gordon Korman

Surviving the Applewhites, Stephanie Tolan (2)

Tackle Without a Team, Matt Christopher

Tail of Emily Windsnap, Liz Kessler

Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing, Jude Blume (2)

Teen Dream Power: Unlock the Meaning of Your Dreams, M. J. Abadie

Terrible Tractors of Texas, Jonathan Rand

Terror Stalks Traverse City, Jonathan Rand

There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom, Louis Sachar (2)

Things Not Seen, Andrew Clements (2)

The Third Horror, R.L. Stine

Thirteen Going on Seven, Marilyn Sachs

Three Point Play, Todd Hafer

Through My Eyes, Ruby Bridges

The Tiger Rising, Kate DiCamillo

Time Cat, Lloyd Alexander

Too Hot to Handle, Matt Christopher

Top 10 Football Quarterbacks, William Lace

Trial By Journal, Kate Klise

Tuck Everlasting, Natalie Babbitt (3)

Twenty and Ten, Claire Huchet Bishop

20000 Leagues Under the Sea, Jules Verne

Twin Terror, Janice Harrell

Two-Minute Mysteries, Donald Sobol

The Two Princesses of Bamarre, Gail Carson Levine

The Ugly Princess and the Wise Fool, Margaret Gray

Under the Watsons' Porch, Susan Shreve

Unlocking the Animal Mind, Franklin McMillan

Upchuck and the Rotten Willy, Bill Wallace

The Vampire, Les Martin

The Vile Village, Lemony Snicket (6)

Visual Dictionary of Star Wars Episode III, DK Publishing

The Wanderer, Sharon Creech

The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963, Christopher Paul Curtis (2)

Warriors Don't Cry, Melba Beals (3)

Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger, Louis Sachar

Wayside School is Falling Down, Louis Sachar

We'll Race You Henry: A Story About Henry Ford, Barbara Mitchell

Werewolf Skin, R.L. Stine

Westward to Home: Joshua's Oregon Trail Diary, Patricia Hermes

What Did I Do to Deserve a Sister Like You?, Angela Medearis

What Scares You the Most?, R.L. Stine

What Would Joey Do?, Jack Gantos (4)

When the Tripods Came, John Christopher

Which Witch, Eva Ibbotson

The Whipping Boy, Sid Fleischman (2)

The White Mountains, John Christopher

White Water Terror, Carolyn Keene

Who Was Harriet Tubman?, Yona McDonough

Who's Been Sleeping in My Grave?, R.L. Stine

The Wide Window, Lemony Snicket (7)

Wisconsin Werewolves, Jonathan Rand (2)

The Wish List, Eoin Colfer

W.I.T.C.H. Adventures: When Lightning Strikes, tk

With Friends Like These Who Needs Enemies, Angela Medearis (2)

Wonder Worm Wars, Margie Palatini

A Wrinkle in Time, Madeleine L'Engle (2)

A Year Down Yonder, Richard Peck (3)

The Yearling, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

Zlata's Diary, Zlata Filipovic

Magazines and Comic Books

Amazing Spiderman, Marvel Comics

American Girl Magazine, American Girl LLC

Captain America, Marvel Comics

Game Informer, Sunrise Publications (4)

Incredible Hulk, Marvel Comics

J-14, Heinrich Bauer North America (5)

Museography, Kalamazoo Valley Museum

Nickelodeon Magazine, Nickelodeon

Nintendo Power, Nintendo

Radio Control Car Action, Air Age Publishing

The Simpsons Comics Spectacular, Matt Groening

Slam!, Primedia Magazines (2)

Spectacular Spider-Man, Marvel Comics

Sports Illustrated, Time Inc. Magazine Company (5)

Sports Illustrated for Kids, Time Inc. Magazine Company

Teen People, Time Inc. Magazine Company

VIBE, VIBE/Spin Ventures

Motion Pictures and DVDs

AVP: Alien vs. Predator, Paul W.S. Anderson (dir.), 20th Century Fox

Blue Collar Comedy Tour: The Movie, C.B. Harding (dir.), Parallel
    Entertainment/Warner Brothers

Bruce Almighty, Tom Shadyac (dir.), Universal

Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen, Sara Sugarman (dir.), Walt Disney Pictures

Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story, Rawson Marshall Thurber (dir.), 20th Century Fox

Footloose, Herbert Ross (dir.), Paramount

Friday Night Lights, Peter Berg (dir.), Imagine Entertainment/Universal

Larry the Cable Guy: Git R Done, Michael Drumm (dir.), Parallel Entertainment

Hulk, Ang Lee (dir.), Marvel Enterprises/Universal

The Incredibles, Brad Bird (dir.), Walt Disney Pictures/Pixar

Napoleon Dynamite, Jared Hess (dir.), Fox Searchlight

Remember the Titans, Boaz Yakin (dir.), Jerry Bruckheimer Films/Walt Disney Pictures

Rocky, John G. Avildsen (dir.), Chartoff-Winkler Productions

Rocky II, Sylvester Stallone (dir.), Chartoff-Winkler Productions/United Artists

Rocky III, Sylvester Stallone (dir.). Chartoff-Winkler Productions/United Artists

Rocky IV, Sylvester Stallone (dir.), Chartoff-Winkler Productions/MGM /United Artists

Rocky V, John G. Avildsen (dir.), Chartoff-Winkler Productions/Star Partners II/United
    Artists

Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, Ken Kwapis (dir.), Warner Brothers (2)

Spider-Man, Sam Raimi (dir.), Marvel Enterprises/Columbia Pictures

Spider-Man 2, Sam Raimi (dir.), Marvel Enterprises/Columbia Pictures

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith, George Lucas (dir.), Lucasfilm (2)

Star Wars: Clone Wars, Genndy Tartakovsky (dir.), Cartoon Network/Lucasfilm

Van Helsing, Stephen Sommers (dir.), Universal

Van Helsing: The London Assignment, Sharon Bridgeman (dir.), Universal Home Video

Television Series

American Chopper, Discovery Channel

American Idol, Fox

Fear Factor, NBC

Monster Garage, Discovery Channel

Smallville, The CW (formerly on The WB)

Survivor, CBS

That '70s Show, Fox

The Amazing Race, CBS

The Apprentice, NBC

The Simpsons, Fox

WWE Smackdown!, The CW (formerly on UPN)

Video Games

Ace Combat 4: Shattered Skies, Namco

Baldur's Gate, Black Isle Studios

Bionicle: The Game, Electronic Arts

Call of Duty: Finest Hour, Activision

ESPN NBA 2K5, Sega

Freedom Fighters, Electronic Arts

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, Rockstar Games (2)

Jet Li: Rise to Honor, Sony Computer Entertainment

Midnight Club 3, Rockstar Games

NBA Street 3, Electronic Arts

NFL Street, Electronic Arts

RuneQuest, Avalon Hill

Sims Bustin' Out, Electronic Arts

Star Wars: Battlefront, Lucasarts Entertainment

Star Wars: Battlefront 2, Lucasarts Entertainment

Tak and the Power of Juju, THQ

The Simpsons Hit and Run, Vivendi Universal

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4, TOMMO

Van Helsing, Ubisoft

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