

Reading in New Times: A Study of Early Adolescent Students' Perspectives

by

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Abstract

This study sought to explore reading practices in the lives of early adolescent students, from their perspectives, by examining their experiences with reading in their everyday lives. This study was borne out of my deep-rooted curiosity about children's everyday reading practices, a curiosity that began as an interest in the widespread perception that young people today are not reading. Much of the existing research on this topic has focused on a narrow definition of reading (traditional print-based text) and has not included the broader realm of literacy as a situated practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) as young people actually experience it in their everyday lives. The current study broadened the definition of "reading" to include the reading of multimodal text, including audio and visual components associated with online and digitized cultures.

To better understand the students' perspectives on their reading, I positioned myself in the social constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The theoretical framework was grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978) and scholars in the areas of New Literacy Studies (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993), and The New Literacies Studies (Gee, 2010). Together, these perspectives consider literacy to be a social practice that is always embedded in a particular historical time and cultural context. Halliday's (1975) work on the functions of language also informed this study by highlighting the multiple ways in which language and literacy can be purposeful. This study used an interpretative inquiry research design (Ellis, 1998) to explore the participants' experiences, in order to understand what is important to them, what they care about, and what motivates their reading practices. Informal interviews with five students in the sixth grade were conducted over a five-month period to garner rich storied account of their reading lives. Artifacts were collected of the students' reading

from multiple sources, including both print-based text and digital text. The technological artifacts consisted of electronic and digital devices such as the iPod touch, iPad, smart phone, e-reader and the home computer. The data were analyzed for patterns or recurring themes with respect to what it means for students to be engaged in reading.

The analysis resulted in three main themes, which are: 1) Everyday reading is meaningful; 2) Reading has personal and private dimensions; 3) Readers face constraints. An overarching finding was that young people today read a wide variety of text for purposes that fulfill a variety of functions in their lives. Reading was also not only deeply personal and private for the participants, but it was extremely social and embedded in their everyday social lives. An important conclusion of this study is the understanding that young people not only read; they read more than they realize and more than most people realize. In exercising their strong sense of agency and forging their own reading lives, young people traverse across textual terrains and are motivated to read when it provides them opportunities to achieve their goals and to shape their futures.

In order to foster engagement in reading in the 21st-century classroom, educators must reconsider what constitutes text in contemporary society and find ways to create learning environments that reflect the varied reading practices young people find compelling, relevant, and purposeful in their everyday lives.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Vera Janjic-Watrich. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Reading in new times: A study of early adolescent students’ perspectives”, No. 28473, October 4, 2012.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Reflections on a Life of Reading

I have always been an avid reader and an obsessive collector of books. Having found the power of print and the pleasure of reading early, I feel privileged, as Sumara (1996) describes, to have lived a life that included reading. When I think about some of my favorite places and spaces that brought me pleasure as a child, the library definitely tops the list. For me, Saturdays meant visits to the library, where I would spend hours browsing the aisles for anything that caught my eye. Though many years have passed, I still have vivid memories of standing at the door of the bookmobile at my elementary school, waiting anxiously for my turn, and then of my excitement when I spotted my next *Nancy Drew* book. My early obsession with books saved me from childhood boredom, nourished my curiosities, and provided me with a source of amusement.

I credit my parents with teaching me the importance of books. Even though we were of modest means, we always had books in the house and were never without a subscription to *Reader's Digest* magazine. And, of course, we had the ultimate prized possession – a complete volume set of *Britannica* encyclopedias, which we proudly displayed in our living room. Growing up surrounded with books and traditional print-based text helped me gain knowledge, enlightened me about other people's lives, taught me how to live mine, provided me with solace, and led to blissful escapes from my daily life. Unmistakably, reading has enriched my life in many ways.

The pleasure I experienced while ripping open the plastic covering on my *Highlights* magazine years ago still plays out today when I peek into my mailbox and lay my hands on my new issue of *Chatelaine* magazine. Indeed, this love of print and my passion for reading has continued into motherhood and reading to my sons, and into my professional life as an educator.

It was not long into my career as an elementary special education teacher that I started to agonize over my young students' struggles with reading, and this anxiety led me to make the decision to return to university to pursue a master's degree with a specialty in reading. Later, after completing my graduate degree and through my roles as a reading specialist and literacy consultant, I became deeply interested in students' apparent disillusionment with reading. In my work alongside teachers in their classrooms and in my interactions with students, I observed many students' disinterest and resistance towards school reading. As a teacher of reading I was saddened by this, and I began to question how teaching pedagogy and classroom reading practices may be contributing to this disinterest. My lifelong interest in reading motivated me to pursue doctoral studies. I became familiar with the literature on student reading motivation, and I found many articles that reinforced my perception that students are disinterested in reading. However, I also learned about the concept of literacy as a socially situated practice as well as the idea of "new literacies." I was struck by the gap I saw between the first body of literature and the latter. But it was when I started to read more deeply about the concept of literacy as a social practice that my thinking began to change. Consequently, I found the term "disinterested" to be inadequate because it implies a deficit model that does not account for or encompass students' everyday reading practices that may differ from traditional reading practices. A deficit model is at odds with a sociocultural view on literacy as a situated practice. As a result of my evolving perspective, I began to challenge and eventually let go of my assumptions about students' disinterest in reading.

Though I still love to browse in Chapter's bookstore and take immense pleasure in turning the pages of a novel, magazine, or the daily newspaper, my reading behavior, text practices, and identity as a reader have changed in the last few years. Today I am more likely to

have tucked my Kindle Fire tablet into my purse and to be reading the latest e-book instead of reaching for my traditional print-based text. Alternatively, I might access my iPhone in order to send or read a text message, check my calendar, or play a video game. Browsing also takes on a different connotation and involves new behaviors like touching, tapping, sweeping, or scrolling on my iPhone to find a news app to read the top stories, search for books to buy, check out a restaurant or hotel, or shop for personal items online. Just as easily as I have been captivated by the affordances of the digital world, young “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001a) have just as easily been enticed by and drawn into the technological world and may be readers of texts that they consider more relevant in social contexts outside of school. Given the reality of the changing nature of reading in today’s rapidly changing digital world, it is a worthy endeavor to explore reading practices in the lives of young people by examining in more depth the variety of texts they read and how they use reading in their everyday lives. As Manzo (2003) points out:

There is an old Arabic saying that one “cannot step into the same river twice.” Change is constant in all rivers, and the “reading river is no exception.” It seems to have picked up considerable nourishment as it has passed through the seeming debris of the last 30 years of discourse. It also seems now, to be nourishing some new life forms and possibilities.
(p. 660)

Statement of the Problem

A substantial body of research has been directed towards understanding students’ reading habits. However, we have an insufficient understanding of these students’ perspectives on their own reading. Much of the research has also focused on a narrow definition of reading (traditional print-based text) and has not included the broader realm of reading as a situated practice as young people actually experience it in their everyday lives. This experience may be rapidly

changing because of the influx of new and diverse digital technologies and global communication that are pervading society today. Consequently, we still know little about what reading means to young digital natives today, what they are reading, why they read, how they read, places and spaces they read in, and what they identify as reading in today's global world of rapidly changing literacies. Without this knowledge, we do not have sufficient information to design and develop teaching practices, curriculum, classroom environments, and resources that motivate early adolescent students to become actively engaged in reading in school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to explore early adolescent students' perspectives on their reading. My study was conducted from a perspective that views children as social beings with agency in matters that affect their everyday lives (James, Jenk, & Prout, 1998). This perspective acknowledges that children are informed agents who are capable of providing knowledgeable accounts of their lives and can articulate their own expert world views.

In order to explore early adolescent students' perspectives on their reading, I employed a theoretical framework that situates reading as a social practice within a particular historical time and cultural context. In contrast to many of the traditional studies on students' reading interests, and consistent with other studies (Blair & Sanford, 2003; Love & Hamston, 2003; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008), I expanded the narrow definition of reading to include the reading of multimodal text, including audio and visual components associated with online and digitized cultures. Since the ability to read is so vital in today's society, the rapidly changing nature of reading and the demands of new literacies warranted a study to understand students' perspectives on their reading.

Research Questions

The research question that I wished to address more deeply and that was central in my study was: What are the perspectives of early adolescent students on their reading? In my study I explored students' perspectives on the types of texts they read, the purposes they have for reading, the people who influenced their reading, and their social interactions with peers and others in relation to their reading. My study was guided by the following secondary questions: 1) How do students use reading in their everyday lives? 2) What do students identify as their purposes and interests for reading? 3) How do students characterize the involvement of teachers, parents, peers, and others in their reading? I was particularly interested in exploring how reading helped to shape their identity, and which experiences and practices support students' engagement in reading, and which seem to impede their reading.

Significance of the Study

My study advances our understanding of early adolescent students' reading practices in their everyday lives. Educators will be able to better connect with their students if they can incorporate teaching practices that draw on the reading that children do outside of school. With an increased understanding of contemporary reading practices in today's technology-rich culture, educators can bridge old and new literacies and help to expand their students' reading identities in and out of school. Furthermore, this study was intended to contribute knowledge to shape curriculum and improve teaching practices so that educators can incorporate the range of reading valued by students in a culture infused with rapidly changing literacies. Ultimately, the goal of an inquiry into reading is "to contribute toward a deeper and richer understanding of how the social and cultural world ticks" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 33). Thus, my study informs

theory and practice in the area of reading in the rapidly changing technological era of the 21st century.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarification, I have selected and defined a number of terms that I have used throughout my research study. I have reviewed professional literature and selected definitions I considered to be the most complete and relevant to my study. For the purpose of this study, the term “text” encompasses a broader concept of text, which includes traditional print-based text and involves text structures that include nonlinear, interactive, and hypertextual networks (Coiro, 2003). *Traditional print-based text* is a kind of text that includes two types of media, print and two-dimensional graphics (Coiro, 2003), and refers to linear, static print media text such as books, magazines, comics, and newspapers. In contrast to static words on a page, *digital (i.e., electronic) text* refers to different text structures (linear, interactive, hypertextual, multimodal) that can be read, created, produced, or accessed on a screen. These structures combine a range of symbols and “multiple media formats,” that include audio, animated symbols, icons, photographs, video, and virtual reality environments, and provide avenues to interact with others (Coiro, 2003). *Multimodal text* involves more than one mode of communication (visual, verbal, and gestural) that blends traditional print-based text with image, sound, music, animation, art, and/or gestures and is associated with online and digitized cultures (Kress, 2003).

In relation to the terms “literacy” and “reading,” though “literacy” is a broader construct that encompasses reading and is understood as a social practice (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993), in the context of this study I use the term “reading” and not “literacy” because my study is an exploration of reading practices. I only use the term “literacy”

when I incorporate the words of others who have used this term. I use the term “reading” to describe the interpretation of text that includes conventional alphabetic print symbols and letters or words (Goodman, 1996), where meaning resides in the dynamic transaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978). In my study, the definition of “reading” is expanded to include the reading of multimodal text. When teachers and parents were asked to describe each child as being either an avid reader or not, the term “avid” in my study was used to mean “very eager.”

Theoretical Framework

To explore early adolescent students’ perspectives on their reading, I position myself in the social constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I draw upon a sociocultural framework proposed by Vygotsky (1978), which predates the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993) and The New Literacies Studies (Gee, 2010) perspectives. My emphasis on reading and identity construction is what led me to Gee’s (1996) work on Discourse as it applies to a community of socially and culturally situated practices. Together these perspectives build on Vygotsky’s (1978) work, which situates literacy as a social practice and views literacy as a social activity within a particular historical time and cultural context. Halliday’s (1975) work on the functions of language also informed this study by highlighting the multiple ways in which language and literacy can be purposeful.

Constructivism and Social Constructivism

A key assumption of the constructivist world view from an ontological level is that reality is constructed by the knower through the interaction of the mind and body with the physical, temporal world. From this view, reality is subjective in nature (Paul, 2005). Constructivism, according to Schwandt (2000), means “that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it” (p. 305). In Schwandt’s (2007) words, “the mind is active in

the construction of knowledge” (p. 38). In reference to Paul’s definition, “constructivism is defined in its simplest as an interpretive stance which attends to the meaning-making activities of active agents and cognizing human beings” (p. 60). From the constructivist worldview, as Crotty (1998) acknowledges, “meaning (or truth) cannot be described simply as objective” (p. 43) and accordingly, “cannot be described simply as subjective” (p. 43). Constructivists believe that “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain that the constructivist paradigm “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (pp. 13-14). One strand of constructivism, social constructivism, holds that knowledge is the dynamic, interactive work of the mind, co-constructed and manifested in social practices. From within this strand, knowledge is viewed as being constructed through social interactions which are dynamic, fluid, and constantly changing. Social constructivists stress the social process of learning, where “social experiences shape the ways that students think and interpret the world” (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 139). Moreover, they argue that knowledge and meaning-making activities are constructed culturally and historically through active engagement with others in social contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). . Within this paradigm, individuals are seen as engaging in the construction and reconstruction of a multiplicity of realities that are constantly changing and under development. The individuals are viewed as being shaped culturally, historically, and temporally by and through social processes in the context of social groups.

It was my aim to better understand how early adolescent students’ lives and social interactions are shaped by and shape their reading practices. The social constructivist world

view, which emphasizes the importance of culture, history, and social context, thus shaped my thinking and helped me to understand that the meaning of reading in these young people's lives is socially and culturally constructed. Thus I am guided from within this interpretive framework, and I envisioned my research with children as co-constructors of knowledge and meaning through our social interactions with each other.

Sociocultural Framework and Vygotskian Perspectives

The social constructivist emphasis on the importance of social, historical, cultural, and temporal factors and, particularly, on the contributions of Soviet developmental psychologist and Marxist scholar Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986) are central to my work, because of the implications for researching children's everyday experiences with reading. From a Vygotskian perspective, the way people think is learned primarily through social interactions, and that language in use develops through social contexts. According to Wertsch (1991), "a fundamental assumption of a sociocultural approach to the study of mind is that what is to be described and explained is human action" (p. 8). Prioritizing action as a focus of analysis means that "human beings are viewed as coming into contact with, and creating, their surroundings as well as themselves through the actions in which they engage" (p. 8). This human action as Wertsch notes, "cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out" (p. 18).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach to understanding mediated action is founded on three basic tenets about learning: 1) learning is developmental; 2) learning derives from social life; and 3) all human action, social or individual, is mediated by *tools* and *signs* such as language (Wertsch, 1991). His reliance on developmental analysis "is motivated by the assumption that it is possible to understand many aspects of mental functioning only if one understands their origin and the transitions they have undergone" (p. 19). According to

Vygotsky's theoretical position (1978), cognitive development was not a "gradual accumulation of separate changes" (p. 73) and linear development, but a "complex dialectical process" (p. 73) of evolutionary and revolutionary change. As John-Steiner and Soubberman (1978) point out Vygotsky's theory "focused upon the historically shaped and culturally transmitted psychology of human beings" (p. 122).

The first basic tenet as theorized by Vygotsky (1978) is that "humans are active, vigorous participants in their own existence and that at each stage of development children acquire the means by which they can competently affect their world and themselves" (p. 123). John-Steiner and Soubberman (1978) explain that "a crucial aspect of human mastery, beginning in infancy, is the creation and use of auxiliary or 'artificial' stimuli; through such stimuli an immediate situation and the reaction linked to it are altered by active human intervention" (p. 123).

Vygotsky (1978) conceived auxiliary stimuli to be highly diverse and a means of active adaptation, which "include the tools of the culture into which the child is born, the language of those who relate to the child, and the ingenious means produced by the child himself" (p. 123).

The second basic tenet of Vygotsky's sociocultural theoretical framework is the fundamental role that social interaction plays in cognitive development. From the Vygotskian perspective, "one of the essential aspects of development is the increasing ability of children to control and direct their own behavior, a mastery made possible by the development of new psychological forms and functions and by the use of signs and tools in this process" (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978, p. 126). Vygotsky's (1978) focus upon "socially elaborated learning" (p. 125) acknowledges that "every function in the child's development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (p. 57).

The third basic tenet of Vygotskian sociocultural approach is that tools and signs (or psychological tools) exist as important mediators in the development of higher mental functioning. Vygotsky (1978) symbolizes the concept of tools in this way: “The tool implies specific human activity, the transforming reaction of man on nature, the animal merely *uses* external nature, and brings about changes in it simply by his presence; man, [sic] by his changes, makes it serve its end, *masters it*” (p. 7). Vygotsky (1978) understood that tools, such as the use of sign systems (language, writing, number systems) mediate humans’ social environments and “are created by societies over the course of human history and change with the form of society and the level of its cultural development” (p. 7). Although tools and signs both involve mediated activity, according to Vygotsky (1978) they fundamentally differ in properties: “Signs are internally oriented, a means of psychological influence aimed at mastering oneself; tools, on the other hand, are externally oriented, aimed at mastering and triumphing over nature” (John-Steiner & Souberman, 1978, p. 127). In the tradition of Marxist theory, Vygotsky (1978) proposed that “historical changes in society and material life produce changes in human nature” (p. 7). Given the changing nature of reading, this supposition has significance for children’s evolving reading practices in the 21st century.

The impact of the historical-cultural approach on my proposed study lies in Vygotsky’s (1978) study of human social development and existence and his emphasis on “adaptive capabilities” (p. 132). Its relevance to my topic of interest, exploring children’s reading practices in their everyday lives, is in understanding that “as human beings we actively realize and change ourselves in varied contexts of culture and history” (John-Steiner & Souberman, 1978, p. 131). This emphasis, according to John-Steiner and Souberman, is “perhaps the most distinguishing theme of Vygotsky’s writings” (p. 131).

Within the social constructivist paradigm there are several perspectives that inform my study, and in particular researchers in the New Literacy Studies (NLS) tradition and notably the contributions of Halliday (1969), a linguist, whose work on the nature and uses of language also served as a framework to analyze how young people in my study use reading in their everyday lives. It is from within this sociocultural conceptual framework that I have constructed my methodology and interpreted my findings. The following is a discussion of their theories as they relate to and inform my research study.

Conceptual Framework

New Literacy Studies (NLS)

New Literacy Studies (NLS) have their origins in the sociocultural perspective and seek to understand literacy in everyday life from a range of perspectives to include cognitive, social, cultural, and historical contexts (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993). Though the NLS field is not “new” anymore, but an old field of study, it is still a widely used and well-known sociocultural approach to literacy (Gee, 2012). NLS first emerged in the 1980s, when key scholars began to investigate the traditional view of reading and to seriously question, “What is literacy and what is it good for?” (Gee, 2008, p. 42). In contrast to the more traditional views on the importance of literacy, Gee (2008) challenged the so-called “literacy myth” and maintained that good things do not necessarily happen as a result of literacy, and this is “because literacy in and of itself, abstracted from historical conditions and social practices, has no effects, or, at least, no predictable effects” (p. 45). Gee (2012) disputed this “omnipotent view of literacy” and argued that “the role of literacy is always much more complex and contradictory and more deeply intertwined with other facts, than the literacy myth allows” (p. 47). Street (2005) situates literacy in the contexts of its use. According to Street (2006), New Literacy

Studies “[refer] to a body of work that for the past twenty years has approached the study of literacy not as an issue of measurement or of skills but as social practices that vary from one context to another” (p. 21). Street’s (1984, 1993) literacy framework draws our attention away from reading as merely a set of neutral technical skills and an autonomous model, which claims to be value-free “despite the very different needs and experiences of learners” (Larson, 2006, p. 320), to a broader understanding of literacy as an ideological practice with an embedded or social nature. According to Barton and Hamilton (1998), “literacy is something people do; it is an activity; and like all human activity, it is essentially social and located in the interactions between people” (p. 3).

Gee (2008) explains that reading always involves a certain type of text and requires access to prior knowledge and a set of skills to be read for meaning (e.g., novels, poems, newspaper, non-fiction), and “there are many different levels of meaning one can give to or take from any text, many different ways in which any text can be read” (p. 43). The argument is that reading “must be spelled out as multiple abilities, each a type of literacy, one of a set of literacies” (p. 44). From a sociocultural view of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984), this means that reading a certain type of text in a certain way is acquired “only by one’s being embedded (apprenticed) as a member of a social practice wherein people not only read texts of this type in this way, but also talk about such text in certain ways, hold certain attitudes and values about them, and socially interact over them in certain ways” (Gee, 2008, p. 44). Similarly, researchers in the New Literacy Studies tradition argue that all literacies are “situated” (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000, p. 1) and argue that literacy is always encountered in a certain context. The term ‘context,’ as van Enk, Dagenais, & Tookey (2005) point out, “refers not to an inconsequential backdrop, but to the

practices of a group of people in time and place, people who read and write particular things in particular ways for particular purposes” (p. 496). Bearne (2003) reminds us that “literacy exists not only on a page or screen, but in the practices which surround it and the situations in which literacy is carried out” (p. 98). The idea that literacies are understood as “socially recognized ways” (p. 33) in which people “generate and communicate, and negotiate meaning as members of discourse, through the medium of encoded text” (p. 33) is essentially a reference to reading as a social practice (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

Reading as a social practice. The concept of reading as a social practice situated in a particular historical time, place, and discourse (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996, Heath, 1983; New London Group, 1996; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984) is a key construct in the sociocultural approach to understanding literacy and a key tenet of the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Borne out of the groundbreaking work of Scribner and Cole (1981) and their study of literacy amongst the Vai people in Liberia, the construct of “practice,” together with related ideas such as “activity,” “context,” and “situation,” provided a new way to conceptualize and understand literacy. They used the term “practice” to mean “a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge.” (p. 236). From their perspective, literacy as an organized social practice was “not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use” (p. 236). Their efforts, as documented in the *Psychology of Literacy*, changed the field of literacy studies, according to Hull & Schultz (2002), by describing different domains of practices (places where literacy is practiced) and redefining literacy “as a multiple rather than a unitary construct, calling attention to the distinctive literacies that can exist beyond the schoolhouse door” (p. 20). This new construct of literacy is best

understood in the context of social practices. In theorizing literacy as a social practice, Barton (1994) examined the role of literacy in people's lives (home, workplace, community) and stressed that literacy "starts from people's uses of literacy . . . from everyday life . . . and from the everyday activities which people are involved in" (p. 34). He proposed an "ecological approach," or a real-life approach, which "aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and in thought, and its position in history, language and learning" (p. 32).

Two ideas which are central to understanding New Literacy Studies are literacy practice and literacy events. With sociolinguistic roots traced to Heath (1983) and Hymes (1962), Barton (1994) conceptualized literacy practice and literacy events in this way: "Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy which people draw upon in a literacy event" (p. 37). In other words, as Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2000) state, "literacy practices are what people do with literacy" (p. 7). They further explain that literacy practices are internal processes and are related to "people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy" (p. 7). Street (2000) developed the concept of practice not only to "handle the events and the patterns of activity around literacy, but to link them to something broader of a cultural and social kind" (p. 21). What people do with text, what these activities mean to them, and how texts fit into their lives remain central in his research and in many other studies of literacy practices (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic (2000). According to Street (1993), literacy practices are not observable behaviors but something we hold in our head, as they encompass the values, attitudes, feelings, social relationships, and assumptions surrounding the social uses of text. Literacy events, conversely, are observable episodes and involve particular activities that arise from practices and are shaped by them

(Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 7). Barton (1994) writes that “literacy events are the particular activities where literacy has a role” (p. 37). The original notion of literacy events, according to Barton (2001), “grew out of work on speech events, with the idea of a literacy event being a speech event with a text in it; the talk around a text is the classic literacy event” (p. 99). He states that “together, events and practices are the two basic units of analysis of the social activity of literacy” (p. 37).

Street (2000) offers a useful distinction and explains that, unlike a literacy practice, it is possible to take a photograph of a literacy event. For example, Hornberger (2001) highlights the example of a literacy event where a parent and a child are reading a bedtime story together, “undergirded by a set of literacy practices that include talk around the text and involve story reading conventions, attitudes towards books and literacy, expectations about parenting child relationships among others” (p. 360). Another literacy event could involve the particular activity of two girls reading and posting pictures on Instagram, although the decisions and talk revolving around the text and one’s personal beliefs, values, and assumptions are associated with the literacy practices of online social networking. As a literacy practice, reading “always involves apprenticeship to some social group that reads (acts, talks, values) in certain ways in regard to such text” (Gee, 2008, p. 48), so it follows that “reading can never be neutral, asocial, or apolitical” (p. 48). Defining reading as a social practice means considering that one must be socialized into a practice in order to read certain types of texts, or as Gee (2008) observes: “One does not learn to read texts of type X in way Y unless one has had experience in settings where texts of type X are read in way Y” (p. 45).

In the context of Barton’s (1994) framework and New Literacy Studies, literacy practices can only be examined in the context of the social and cultural domains in which they exist (Gee,

2001). As Barton (1994) points out, literacies are identified culturally, and different people have different literacies that are associated with and shaped by different contexts, such as home, work, and school. These contexts and practices give rise to different practices in different situations. The significance of this perspective on literacy practices to any thorough examination of literacy practices “is to realize that literacy may be different in different domains and that school, for example, is but one domain of literacy activity” (p. 40). Literacy practices, as Barton (1994) explains and Gee (2008) reiterates, are always interwoven into the larger social context, which involves “talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing” (Gee, 2008, p. 45), and in this sense incorporate identity.

Reading and identity. Under the banner of New Literacy Studies, Gee (1996) proposed a more encompassing category for the study of language and literacy, which he identified as Discourse, with a capital D, as opposed to “discourse,” which relates to an exchange of ideas and thoughts on a subject. Conceptualized by Gee (1996), Discourses are “our culturally distinctive ways of being an everyday person” (p. 168). Discourse is best understood as how we do life as situated selves, who are members of social and cultural communities, and it is also tied to identity. Discourses incorporate “ways of being in the world; they are forms of life, they are socially situated identities” (p. 3). Gee defined Discourse as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, and speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or types of people) by specific groups of people “ (p. viii). Gee (2008) refers to Discourse as a sort of “identity kit” that can be used “to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (p. 161) and as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’, in a given context” (p. 99). The identity kit can change from moment to moment and from one context to another and can serve as an important analytic lens for

understanding society and school. As Gee (1996) explains, “Discourse is thus more than talk or language; it involves ways of combining and coordinating human elements such as thinking, feelings, believing, valuing, and acting” (p. 161) together with non-human elements such as the use of “various tools, technologies, and props that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network” (p. 161). Discourses, then, are about “how people get their acts together to get recognized as a given kind of person at a specific time and place” (Gee, 2008, p. 155). Gee (2008) distinguished between two sorts of Discourses; the Dominant, or Primary, “which constitutes our first social identity” (p. 168) and Secondary Discourses, or those into which people are later acculturated. Gee (2008) states that “any socially useful definition of ‘literacy’ must be couched in terms of notions of Primary and Secondary Discourses” (p. 175). As an example of Discourses as a way to think about literacy, Lankshear and Knobel (2011) make the association with the practice of communicating with Facebook, where certain kinds of people are recognized in certain kinds of ways, engaging in recognized patterns of social practices in meaningful ways. Thus, literacies, as Lankshear and Knobel (2011) succinctly describe, are “socially recognized ways in which people generate, communicate, and negotiate meaning, as members of Discourses, through the medium of encoded text . . . whether that be blogging, reading novels, or bus schedules” (p. 50). Just as NLS is concerned with “different ways of using written language within different sorts of sociocultural practices,” a related group of studies, The New Literacies Studies, are concerned specifically with *digital literacies*, and address the “different ways of using digital tools within different sorts of sociocultural practices” (p. 172).

The New Literacies Studies. As conceptualized by Gee (2010), and aligned with a sociocultural perspective on literacy, The New Literacies Studies is a branch of New Literacy

Studies (NLS) and “simply carries over the (NLS) argument about written language to new digital technologies” (p. 172). In this context, The New Literacies Studies perspective is concerned with studying literacy practices of individuals who use digital technologies. Insofar as “the NLS was about studying literacy in a new way” (p. 172), which saw literacy as “something people did not just do inside their heads but inside society” (p. 166) and where “readers and writers are engaged in social and cultural practices” (p. 166), The New Literacies Studies “is about studying new types of literacy beyond print literacy, especially digital literacies and literacy practices embedded in popular culture” (p. 172). Gee explains that “The New Literacies Studies view different digital tools as technologies for giving and getting meaning” (p. 172) in much the same way that language serves as a mediational tool for giving and getting meaning. In accordance with the NLS argument, “the meanings to which these technologies give rise are determined by the social, cultural, historical, and institutional practices of different groups of people” (p. 172). Furthermore, “these practices almost always involve more than just using a digital tool – they also involve ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing, and knowing” (p. 172). An offshoot of NLS, The New Literacies Studies provide a contemporary approach to explore the varied ways that reading is practiced in today’s technology-rich culture. The New Literacies Studies perspective serves as a useful approach to study and to deepen the understanding of the full range of reading associated with online digitized cultures practiced in contemporary society.

Halliday’s Sociolinguistic Perspective

Halliday is known as one of the founders of sociolinguistics, which is the study of how language is used in everyday life. Halliday’s (1969) theory of language (*Systemic Functional Linguistics*) supported the notion of language function and is concerned primarily with the nature

and uses of language; in other words, what language is and what language does. Halliday looked at children's language development and proposed that children learn about language by using it in real life situations. He proposed that children use language for specific functions in order to meet specific needs. He characterized seven different functions of language. In summarizing his theory of language as functional, Halliday argued that "all language is doing something; in other words, it has meaning" (p. 34-35). Moreover, these meanings are influenced by the social conditions and the cultural contexts in which they occur. Understanding language, both oral and written, then begins with an understanding of how all people at any age use language and what they do with language. The seven functions give us a way to categorize how people use oral and written language. In this broader sense, Halliday's Functions of Language are tied to people's experiences in the social world and are applicable for all of our literate lives. Language use, including reading, is a purposeful activity and fulfills certain functions in people's everyday lives.

In his theory of early language development, he identified seven functions that language has for young children. Halliday conceived that children use language purposefully to fulfill functions in their lives. The first four uses of language serve to satisfy their physical, social, and emotional needs. Halliday named the uses instrumental, regulatory, interactional, and personal functions. Instrumental, being one of the earliest uses of language, is where a child first becomes aware that language can be used as a means to express his or her needs or "[get] things done" (p. 28), and it serves the function of: "I want" (p. 29). Language, as an instrument of control, is also used to regulate the behavior of others and to tell them what to do, such as "come here." and is regulatory in this use. Closely related is the interactional function, which refers to the use of language to form relationships and make contact with others and serves the "me and him"

function, such as “love you daddy.” The personal refers to another use of language, to express feelings, opinions, and individuality, such as “here I come.” Halliday noted that a child becomes aware of his or her own identity and the development of their personality through linguistic interaction. He argued that “the shaping of self through interaction with others is very much a language-mediated process” (p. 31). Associated with the “non-self” (p. 31) is the child’s growing understanding of the environment, which is related to and conceived in the next three functions of language: heuristic, imaginative, and representational. The heuristic function refers to language as a way to explore, to learn about things, and to gain knowledge, and it is the “tell me why” function (p.34), which is very obvious in a child’s incessant questioning of those around him or her. When a child uses language to create an environment, or “a world of their own making” (p. 32), this relates to the imaginative function, or the “let’s pretend” (p. 34). Here language is a means of a child’s linguistic play and is used to tell stories, poems, and riddles. Lastly, language is used for the communication of content, or to express a message, and serves the function of: “I’ve got something to tell you” (p. 34). Halliday maintained that all seven functions of language “contribute to the child’s total picture of ‘language at work’” (p. 28).

In my study, Halliday’s seven functions of language model offers a useful analytical tool and will be applied as a framework to explore the functions of reading when analyzing young people’s interactions with text, both traditional print-based and digital text. Although Halliday did not address digital or multimodal text in his theory of language development, his claims about language use as a functional, meaningful, and semiotic (i.e., signs and symbols) process influenced by social and cultural contexts encompass an array of language uses. His theory, therefore, is a useful framework and an analytical tool for my study, because his functional uses of language can be applied to all literate life and thereby serves a wide range of needs, which in

contemporary society includes young people's realization of different intentions associated with digital text. As Halliday theorized, "What is common to every use of language is that it is meaningful, contextualized, and in the broadest sense social; this is brought home very clearly to the child, in the course of his day-to-day experience" (p. 37).

In addition to the theoretical and conceptual framework outlined above, Chapter One provided an introduction for the research study. The remainder of the dissertation is organized in the following way. Chapter Two presents an overview of the relevant research directly related to the topics raised in my dissertation. Chapter Three outlines the study methodology and provides a detailed summary of the research design, methodological details, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations as well as the study limitations. Chapter Four summarizes the study findings and begins with a description of the context for the study and then an introduction of the five study participants. The findings are organized around three central themes as they relate to and support the data and the purpose of the study. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings, the implications for our understanding of early adolescent students' reading practices in their everyday lives, and suggestions for future research. The chapter ends with reflections and a conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I have divided my review of the literature into three sections. In an attempt to highlight the nature of reading as an artifact of culture, the first section includes a brief synopsis of the history of reading, books, and text. I think this section is important to include because it serves as a bridge to talk about how reading has changed over time yet throughout history people are continually “up in arms” about what constitutes reading. In the second section, I review literature pertaining to the topic of students’ reading habits, attitudes, and interests. The main focus is on early adolescents because this is the age group involved in the study. This section consists of two parts: the first part provides an overview and review of large-scale studies that use quantitative methods, such as questionnaires and surveys methods, and the second part provides an overview and review of studies that explore students’ perspectives on reading and which use qualitative methods, such as student interviews as the primary method of data collection. The third section consists of a review and analysis of studies from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) approach to literacy, which views reading as a situated social practice.

A Brief Synopsis of the History of Reading, Books, and Text

Scholars who draw on the sociocultural perspective consider literacy to be an artifact of culture, and they argue that “literacy changes as cultures changes” (Baker, Pearson, & Rozendal, 2010, p. 2). As Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer (2006) point out, “Reading is an activity that is deeply connected to its historical period and to the material and social conditions in which the reading occurs” (p. 28). So too are the values and attitudes associated with it. The communicative techniques of and perspectives on reading – like the nature of texts themselves – have a deeply rooted history embedded in social, political, and cultural contexts, which has changed through the generations. Yet reading has faced criticism over the years, from Socrates’

condemnation of written language and his rejection of books (Manguel, 1996; O'Donnell, 1998) to Plato's attack on writing as a "deterioration of human memory" (Gee, 2008, p. 51) to the protestations that exist today about the decline in books in light of the increasing popularity of digital text (National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), 2007) and online reading environments for children's reading.

As Manguel (1996) observes, the practice of silent reading replaced oral reading by the end of the 6th century, and this practice transformed reading from a shared act to a private, solitary act. It eventually became the preferred method for reading. In Darnton's (1982) account of silent reading, we learn that reading habits also changed in the 18th and 19th centuries from more "intensive to more extensive reading" (p. 79). The shift to extensive reading sparked a belief that readers could now read quickly through all kinds of material, "seeking entertainment rather than edification" (p. 79). According to Darnton (1982), "Debates about the importance of books in people's lives, questions about reading material, and who reads what text for what purposes and where, became significant points of discussion" (p. 80). In Ross et al.'s (2006) analysis of the treatment of fiction and the prevalent practice of the banning and the removal of popular fiction books from the shelves in many public libraries in the late 1800s, the authors cite Stevenson (1897), who referred to readers of fiction in this time period as "fiction fiends" and likened the "mind weakening habit of novel-reading of the uneducated, busy, or idle to the habit forming opium habit" (p. 12). This view continues to prevail, two centuries later, in the contemporary context. As Ross et al. (2006) explain, "The same argument against fiction gets redeployed in attacks on other marginalized materials that appeal to readers, such as the romance genre, the western, series books, graphic novels, and so on" (p. 13).

History, in sum, has demonstrated that perceptions of what counts as reading have changed over time (Ross et al., 2006). In addition, just as changing reading practices have contributed to new ideas about literacy and what literacy entails, so have changes in reading media – in the form of textuality itself – contributed to different kinds of reader engagement. From the papyrus scrolls to the codex book, to the computer screen and the increasing popularity of digital formats (Ross et al., 2006), the book has been reconfigured from the linear format of traditional print-based text to the nonlinear format of the multimodal text (Ross et al., 2006) and has, as a result, changed the nature of reading and text. Typically, conventional texts involve two types of media, print and two-dimensional graphics (Coiro, 2003), and these were traditionally perceived as privileged forms of print (Love & Hamston, 2003), which typically were more valued in school.

Today, a broader understanding of text structures has resulted from a shift to a multiliteracies approach (New London Group, 1996) to reading, which encompasses a “burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (p. 1), “where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral” (p. 4), and involves multimodal text structures that include nonlinear, interactive, and hypertextual networks (Coiro, 2003). Examples of new text sources include online environments on the Internet as well as digital and electronic formats such as e-book readers, like the Kindle, and digital tablet devices such as the iPad. In contrast to static words on a page, digital and online text environments can combine a range of media that includes audio, animation, icons, photographs, video, and virtual reality environments, and these environments provide avenues to interact with others (Coiro, 2003; Kress, 2003). What constitutes text continues to be redefined and expanded as new capabilities and affordances are realized in the rapidly changing global

communication and information technologies environment (Bearne, 2005). In constructing the exciting benefits and potential that electronic environments open up for reading, cyber-theorist James O'Donnell (1998) reminds us that "We live in an age unprecedentedly fortunate in its recognition that reading is not one simple thing, but a related set of activities, each with its own power for enlightenment" (p. 28).

In an effort to understand the complexity of the reading experience, Sumara (1996) proposes the notion of reading as embodied action, and he reasons that any discussion about the experience of reading "cannot be accomplished in the absence of inquiry into lived experience" (p. 385). To conceptualize reading as embodied action suggests that "reading is not a virtual experience that is somehow removed from the dailyness of life" (Sumara, 1996, p. 385); instead, "reading becomes inextricable from the reader's past, present, and imagined experiences" (p. 385). From this stance, like any other lived experience, the experience of reading "must be examined alongside the complex relations that occur with reading" (Sumara, 1996, p. 391).

From a sociocultural perspective, reading is embedded in everyday life (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 1996), it is complex (Bintz, 1993), and it encompasses a wide range and multitude of texts (Bearne, 2005). Research also indicates that the leisure reading in which young people engage today is often marginalized and dismissed as not real reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). These studies and more demonstrate that debates about what constitutes reading and the mysteries surrounding reading practices continue in our society today (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008), as they have in previous years.

Large-Scale, Quantitative Studies of Reading Habits, Attitudes, and Interests

A large number of studies have investigated students' reading habits through the use of methods that employ large-scale questionnaires and surveys. In the first part of this section, I have included studies that used a narrow definition of reading (print-based); in the second part, are studies that used an expanded definition of reading. These studies offer invaluable quantitative data on the reading habits, attitudes, and interests of large populations of adolescent and elementary students.

Studies That Used a Narrow (Print-Based) Definition of Reading

An important question for researching students' interest in reading and their reading habits is the value and relevance of in-school reading materials. An influential study clearly established that "literary works and traditional school reading materials" (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999, p. 23) – for example, biographies, adventure, and history – were relatively unpopular compared to students' recreational reading preferences in their everyday lives. In their survey of 419 sixth-grade students' reading preferences, Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) found that the majority of students preferred texts that are not traditionally used in classrooms, such as horror stories, cartoons and comics, and sports and drawing books, and 23% of participants checked the "other" option on the survey. For these students, popular magazines, such as those focusing on teen culture, music, and video games, was listed as preferred reading materials. Worthy, Moorman and Turner's noted that their findings shed light on the "increasing gap between students' preferences and the materials that schools provide and recommend" (p. 23) for their reading. The study findings emphasize the importance of broadening the definition of reading in school "to include the use of materials that students read outside of school." (p. 24). In their examination of the limitations and implications of their study, the researchers explain

that “while our combination of survey measures yielded valuable insights into the preferences of a large number of students, more in-depth information about students’ interests would be valuable” (p. 23). Though the researchers acknowledge that “knowing how and why students choose books would add important dimensions” (p. 23) to their understanding of students’ reading habits, what remains unknown is the purposes students have for reading, who influences their reading, and their social interactions with peers in relation to their reading.

Taking into account children’s preference for self-selected reading materials, it is important to understand students’ leisure reading habits in more depth. Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) surveyed 584 urban students in the fifth through eighth grades. They were particularly interested in exploring whether adolescents read; what, when, and why they read; what topics they read; how they obtain their reading materials; and, who encourages their reading. In reference to specific influences, the researchers found parents (70%) and teachers (63%) topped the list but only 15% of the students indicated their friends encouraged them to read. The researchers found that of the 72% of the students who engaged in leisure time reading, “22% read ‘constantly,’ 50% ‘read only when they get a chance,’ 6% do not read; and, 22% only read in school” (p. 23). What the researchers failed to clarify, and what remains largely unclear, is how students interpreted Hughes-Hassell and Rodge’s use of the word “constantly” and the phrase “read only when they get a chance” and whether and how these terms have consistent meaning. In reference to students’ reading preferences, the researchers found that both boys and girls preferred magazines over other texts such as “books for pleasure” and newspapers. Roughly the same percentage of boys and girls preferred the Internet as a primary source of reading material. An important and unexpected finding revealed that students who said they do not enjoy reading reported that they spent time to surf the web and play video games. In light of the

motivating power of the Internet to young adolescents' out-of-school literacy lives, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) acknowledge the need for "teachers [to] recognize this type of reading as legitimate" (p. 28) and for teachers to recognize that "if we want urban students to engage in leisure reading, perhaps the first thing we need to do is to expand our definition of reading" (p. 28). Although the researchers recognize the changing nature of reading and acknowledge the need to broaden the range of the reading children engage in to include the Internet, the study did not explore the social aspects of reading that are an important part of a sociocultural perspective that views reading as a social practice. Recognizing the connection between leisure reading and cultivating relationships, Knoester critiqued studies such as Hughes-Hassell and Rodge's (2007) survey of reading habits, where, out of the 10 possible responses the researchers offered to describe adolescents' motivation to read, not one related to social interactions or cultivating relationships. This shortcoming is reflected in the options students were given on the survey for identifying their reasons to read. The top four reasons students listed were "for fun, to learn something/it's educational, it's relaxing; and, because I'm bored" (p. 25). Out of the ten choices students were supplied, not one of the options reflected reading as a social interaction. Given the limitation of the data collection method, this option perhaps was not plausible considering the students' reading was investigated through the use of a questionnaire and not from the students' own words and ideas to describe their own reading experiences. And thus, it is possible that some of their personal reasons for not reading were not reflected in the answers provided in the questionnaire.

In addition to investigating students' leisure reading habits, researchers have also sought to understand the amount of time students devote to reading as compared to other out-of-school activities. Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen (2005) examined leisure reading practices in comparison

to other free-time options and surveyed 100 sixth-graders and 100 ninth-graders, all identified as typical achievers. Their questionnaire consisted of three main questions that asked students to list the activities they do during their free time, to report how much time they spend reading for pleasure outside of school, and to list the types of reading materials they enjoy. The survey provided a list of ten common reading materials, such as poems, novels, and newspapers, and also provided the opportunity to select “other.” after which students were prompted to indicate which types of reading they enjoyed that were not listed. The researchers found that reading as a free-time leisure activity was moderately popular (51%) in comparison to other more popular free-time activities such listening to music/going to concerts (78%), watching television/videos (77%), playing sports (68%), and playing computer/video games (63%). Students’ interest in pleasure reading declined in the 11- to 15-year range. Boys were more likely than girls to report that they spent little time reading for pleasure. Although one finding of the study was that boys stated they preferred computer or video games as a leisure time activity, the limited and narrow definition of reading employed in the study did not include computer or video games as a legitimate text forms. If these text forms had been included as options, it is likely they would have been selected as being the types of reading boys enjoyed. This is important because the study findings highlighted a decline in pleasure reading, especially for boys. By not including these text forms as legitimate forms of reading, the study may not have reflected the contemporary reading practices that young people enjoy today.

Shumow, Schmidt, and Kackar (2008) described and compared the reading habits of 346 sixth- and eighth-grade students and, specifically, the amount of time the middle grade students devoted to reading in and out of school. Using a data collection procedure known as the Experience Sampling Method (ESM), the researchers signaled the students at random times

throughout the course of a week and had them record their activities at the time of the signal. The researchers were interested not only in how much time the students read but also the contexts in which they read as well as why they read. Finally, students were asked to record their affective, cognitive, and motivational states while reading in and out of school. Reading in school included reports of reading that occurred in a variety of subject areas as well as reading which occurred in school but out of class. Out of class reading was considered as times students reported “reading for fun (63%), writing and reading literature (23%), and unspecified reading (14%)” (p. 105). Reading was coded either as a primary activity when the students indicated it was the “main thing they were doing at the time” (p. 105) or a secondary activity when it was listed in response to the question, “what else were you doing at the same time?” The researchers recognized that “these estimates might underestimate the amount of time students spent reading both in and out of school” (p. 105). The researchers noted that “reading was defined as those activities characterized as such by the study participants” (p. 105). An analysis of the reported frequency and duration of reading activities revealed that the majority of the students read for leisure an average of 40 minutes a day outside of school as compared to 17 minutes a day in school. They interpreted this finding as an indication “that reading is a common leisure practice for adolescents and an uncommon activity in middle school classroom” (p. 97). They concluded: 1) girls read more outside of school than boys; 2) family members play a significant role and are considered common reading companions; 3) students are more motivated to read out of school because they are in control of their reading as compared to the more goal-directed reading activities in class; and, finally, 4) students in the study have positive perceptions of themselves as readers and find reading easy in both in- and out-of-school contexts. Although the study affirms that middle school students do read in contexts out of school, in contrast to the Nippold et al.

(2005) findings, and the authors are critical of middle school classrooms that “tend to place limited reading demands on students” (p. 113), many unknowns still remain in our understanding of the reading practice of students in the middle grades. For example, little is known about middle school students’ perceptions and perspectives on their specific reading behaviors, what they read, their purposes for reading, their influences, and their social interactions about and during their reading.

Part of the task of understanding students’ reading preferences involves exploring their attitudes towards reading more closely. The next four studies reviewed the focus on students’ attitudes towards reading and highlight an apparent decline in the occurrence of their pleasure reading. It is important to note that, although these studies have been frequently cited and used to discuss a perceived decline in adolescents’ reading, they are outdated. Given the increasing prevalence of digital-based reading practices, a shortcoming of each study is that reading is narrowly defined as print-based reading practices, and digital practices are ignored. Two of the studies, carried out by Merisuo-Storm (2006) and McKool (2007) respectively, both used the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey developed by McKenna and Kear (1990) to survey the reading attitudes of children. The work of Merisuo-Storm (2006) revealed important differences in the attitudes of boys and girls towards their enjoyment of reading. Specifically, the researcher surveyed 145 fourth-grade Finnish students to investigate and compare girls’ and boys’ (aged 10 and 11) dispositions towards reading. In the adapted 12-item version of the McKenna and Kear’s attitude survey (1990), for example, students responded to questions about their opinions of various types of reading materials as well as activities such as reading aloud in class and visiting the library. Students were to select from amongst four pictures of a teddy bear the one that best reflected their own feelings about reading (very happy/smiling/tired/repulsed). Fourth-grade girls

reported that they enjoyed reading significantly more often than did boys, and girls were more inclined than boys to say they read a variety of texts. Boys seemed to be more restricted in their reading choices. Boys reported enjoying comics, humorous books, and reading series of books, and they found school-type texts less appealing, but girls preferred adventure books and found non-fiction least appealing. Both boys and girls reported that they found reading aloud in class to be very unpleasant. It is important to note that this group comprised eager readers as well as students who reported they did not enjoy reading. The researchers concluded that schools have not been able to instill an interest in reading in their students, particularly amongst boys. In order to “pay serious attention to boys’ literacy needs” (p. 123) Merisuo-Storm suggested, “Teachers should find out what their pupils’ interests are and use that information when planning their literacy teaching.” (p. 123). Although the researcher acknowledged the importance of recognizing and valuing the texts that both genders find appealing, one of the shortcomings of the study was that the survey did not address the range of reading activities in which children engage today, such as reading digital texts. The findings and interpretations presented in this study were limited by the choices offered in the survey, in that the options privileged print-based reading and did not reflect the varied ways reading is practiced by children today.

In addition to gender, researchers have recognized age to be a factor that influences students’ attitudes towards reading and their decision to read or not to read. Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) surveyed 5,076 students (aged 9 to 11 years) over a five-year span (1998–2003) and found that reported reading enjoyment significantly fell over the five-year period. They found that although attitudes towards reading were generally positive, “they declined somewhat between the younger and older of these age groups” (p. 373). As with the other studies reviewed, the design of this study and its ability to be used to describe the reading practices of

contemporary adolescents is limited by the restrictions in the reading attitudes questionnaire. For example, question 15 asked students, “What reading material do you read at home?” with the following options: “story books, comics, magazines, newspapers, information, or poems” (p. 375). According to Blair and Sanford (2004), who critiqued the Sainsbury and Schagen study, the questionnaire used in this study included options that did not deviate far from traditional forms of texts in order to explore the range of reading in which students typically engaged. Furthermore, Blair and Sanford pointed out that Sainsbury and Schagen’s survey did not address the varied ways reading is practiced in the technological era. Thus, it is difficult to generalize their results to contemporary adolescents’ reading habits. Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) themselves acknowledge that “this survey did not address reading on computer screens” (p. 386).

An investigation of students’ declining attitudes towards reading (McKool, 2007) identified environmental factors that influence students’ decisions to read out of school. In her mixed-methods study, McKool compared a group of 199 avid and reluctant fifth-grade students using a variety of data sources and measures (reflexive journals, student activity logs, reading achievement records, free or reduced lunch status), which included the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) and student interviews. The purpose of the study was to understand why some children choose to read while others do not. The ten readers who reported the most voluntary reading (avid) and the ten who reported the least voluntary reading (reluctant) were interviewed about their out-of-school reading habits and their leisure time habits. The questions explored how students felt about themselves as readers, their motivations behind their reading habits and preferences, and examined the connection between their in- and out-of-school reading and the relevance of their out-of-school reading to their lives. A sample of the types of survey questions students were required to respond consisted of: “1) How do you

feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday? 2) How do you feel about reading instead of playing?” (pp. 630-634). McKool (2007) found that “most fifth grade students do very little volunteer reading outside of school” (p. 118). The amount of voluntary reading children did out of school was more directly related to a positive home environment, and in particular the value placed on reading, than it was on socio-economic background. A positive self-concept was found to be a significant factor that predicted voluntary recreational reading, with avid readers tending to have higher self-concepts as readers, tending to have more positive attitudes towards recreational reading, and placed “value [on] the importance of reading more than reluctant readers” (p. 120). Reluctant readers reported that their favourite leisure time activity was television viewing. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of social influences on reading and suggested that parents who discussed books with their children promoted voluntary reading. For example, students were more apt to read a book if it was recommended by someone they respected, like their friends, parents, siblings, or teacher. The researchers observed that “few reluctant readers had parents or friends who made such recommendations.” (p. 125). Although the study findings are informative in terms of exploring the complexities of voluntary reading and why so few students say they choose to read outside of school, an important limitation was the narrow definition of reading as primarily print-based text.

In order to explore and characterize the factors associated with a love of reading, Strommen and Mates (2004) surveyed the reading attitudes of 151 sixth- and ninth-graders in order to identify students as either *Readers* or *Not-readers*. They identified *Readers* as “older children and teens for whom reading extended texts is a significant, pleasurable, recreational activity and consistent part of daily life” (p. 189). As part of an earlier pilot project, the researchers determined statistically that “time spent reading books was a more reliable indicator

of a love of reading than time spent reading shorter text” (p. 190). Out of 151 respondents, a total of 12 students (four sixth-graders and eight ninth-graders) met all of the criteria and were identified as *Readers*, with the greatest number of respondents assigned in the *Not-reader* category. The *Not-reader* group included a cross-section of remedial, general, and honors students, and thus, academic proficiency was not a distinguishing factor between *Readers* and *Not-readers*. Findings revealed no noticeable differences between *Readers* and *Not-readers* with respect to television viewing habits, the nature and number of extracurricular activities, and types of social pursuits. However, a number of important conclusions can be drawn from the study, which distinguishes the attitudes and practices of *Readers* from *Not-readers*:

- 1) *Readers* regularly interact in social circles to discuss books;
- 2) *Readers* strongly identify with members of a reading community;
- 3) *Readers* see being an active member of a community of readers as an important part of their identity;
- 4) *Readers* prioritize reading as a recreational activity;
- 5) *Readers* see reading as an activity that plays a significant and enjoyable role in the life of family members or friends;
- 6) *Readers* have access to a wide variety of reading material;
- 7) *Readers* love reading; and
- 8) *Readers* read no matter how busy they are and make time for reading because it is enjoyable. (pp. 193-195)

Interestingly, all of the *Readers* interviewed connected their love of reading to out-of-school experiences, and school was “not the critical factor” and “played a minor role in all of the conversations” (p. 187). In contrast, *Not-readers* did not identify as readers, did not value

reading or discussing books, and found reading tedious and boring, and although their early encounters might have been pleasant, they felt their parents did not view reading as being important for themselves or the family. In addition, although *Not-readers* valued reading, they often cited not having enough time as the reason they did not read. The study was particularly important to an understanding of the importance of the social nature of reading; however, it did not explore reading materials beyond the narrow definition of reading with print-based text. This narrow focus may explain the reason the Literacy Index questions could yield only 12 *Readers* out of a total of 151 study respondents. For example, two sample questions asked students to respond to: “1) I enjoy reading a good book; 2) Books read in past three years.”(p. 180). Given the rapidly changing nature of reading in the technological era, this study would be more relevant to the context of modern reading practices by adopting, as Ross, et al. (2006) point out, an expanded definition of readers and a re-definition of what constitutes text.

Studies That Used an Expanded (Print and Digital-Based) Definition of Reading

McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, and Meyer (2012) examined the attitudes of 4,491 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students towards both academic and recreational reading. They developed a survey which they adapted from the earlier work of McKenna and Kear (1990). The instrument was comprised of four sub-scales that measured attitudes towards recreational and academic reading in both print and digital formats. The updated version included items associated with reading in digital settings and was intended to acknowledge the shift in young people’s present-day practices towards digital print. The researchers explained “recreational digital” as being the reading students did in their free time, and one example of a given text item reads: “How do you feel about surfing the *Internet* in your free time?” Academic digital reading was explained as reading for purposes of classroom work, with an example being: “How do you

feel about reading news online for class?” McKenna et al. found that females were more positive than males towards academic reading in both print and digital settings. However, males were more positive than females towards recreational reading in digital formats. Attitudes towards reading “showed a gradual worsening” (p.283) over time across the three grade levels, sixth to eighth grade, for three out of the four sub-scales – academic digital, recreational print, and recreational digital. The researchers noted, “The exception was academic print, for which attitudes did not differ by grade” (p. 283).

This study is one of the first quantitative ones to recognize the importance of addressing young people’s digital reading practices. The researchers argued that reading digital texts such as Facebook posts constituted legitimate recreational reading. Given the rapid influx of new technologies, the study was not without limitations. The researchers conceded that having developed the items nearly five years ago, some of the items made references to activities that are now irrelevant (e.g., *Myspace*). And furthermore, they highlighted, “We could not have predicted that reading on tablets (e.g., Nooks, iPad, Kindles) would be as common as it is now” (p. 300). McKenna et al. (2012) recognized the need for follow-up investigations of how young people use print and digital based-text in rapidly changing sociocultural contexts, and they asserted that “qualitative approaches are well suited to identifying these activities” (p. 301). It was encouraging from an interpretive inquiry perspective to see the authors from such a large-scale study recognize the importance of incorporating the participants’ voices and perspectives when studying their practices and habits.

Hopper (2005) chose to take a more holistic definition of reading, which included traditional print and electronic reading material. She analyzed 707 British students’ reading habits (ages 11 to 15) in 30 schools over a one week period using self-assessment questionnaires

that examined what types of books they chose to read and the reasons for their choices. Hopper found that 61% of the adolescents claimed to have read either a fiction or non-fiction book within the past week, which means that reading print-based books was a common pastime for many students. However, in comparison, 93% of students indicated they had chosen to read types of reading materials other than books, such as “magazines, newspapers, and the Internet,” which, as Hopper explained, “may be a substantially under-recognized aspect of their reading habits,” (p. 116). Out of the 93% of students reading non-book texts during the week of the study, magazines were cited as the most popular, with the Internet and newspapers next. Hopper found that although the Internet was a popular reading source and that “new technologies are significant, they have not replaced traditional forms of reading as may have been assumed” (p. 118). In contrast to other contemporary studies that reported a decline in adolescent reading and used a more limited definition of reading, Hopper highlighted two major findings: “1) no significant decline in adolescent habits of reading fiction; and 2) adolescents are reading matter other than fiction” (p. 118).

When considering 93% of adolescents reported reading texts other than fiction, Hopper’s study is important to improve our understanding of adolescents’ reading in that she raises the important question: “How [is] this aspect of school students’ reading acknowledged and used in school” (p. 119). In light of her findings, Hooper questioned whether and how school reading practices reflect or recognize students’ recreational reading practices. In terms of book choices, the researcher concluded that many young readers select books based on the influence of their peer group culture, they choose books their friends enjoy, and they read books about issues that are relevant to their own experiences and lives. Yet their reading preferences may be ignored in school.

Insofar as this study provided valuable information about adolescent students' reading preferences and the factors that influence their book choices, it did not address the more fundamental question of how students use reading in their everyday lives. In terms of limitations, Hooper raised the issue of reliability and said that because of the problems inherent with questionnaires, her findings "might not be totally reliable" (p. 115).

In their continued effort to explore young people's leisure reading habits, the National Literacy Trust (NLT, 2012) reported their second annual literacy survey, conducted in November and December 2011, with 21,000 children aged 8 to 16. Thirty percent of the participants reported reading daily in their own time in 2011 as compared to 40% in 2005. In comparison to their 2005 study, the number of children and youth who responded that they enjoy reading "very much" or "quite a lot" remained steady at approximately 50%. The NLT interpreted these findings to mean that although many children enjoy reading, it is not of primary importance to them and is often pushed aside in favour of other activities.

The NLT highlighted three major findings with regard to young people's reading habits using digital and traditional print-based text. First, more young people reported that they read paper-based materials (72.9%) than on the computer (63.8%) or mobile phones (55.9%). Second, iPads (20.4%) and other multipurpose electronic devices (21.1%) were more popular than single purpose e-readers such as the Kindle (8.8%). Third, most young people reported that they read a mixture of print and digital text (62%) although some read only paper-based text (17.8%) and some read only digital texts (20.2%). This study provided valuable insights into young people's reading preferences and highlighted that most young people read a variety of print- and digital-based texts.

Moore, Alvermann, and Hinchman (2007) examined the connections between adolescents' in- and out-of-school reading in their national survey, which examined the multiple literacy practices of adolescents, using both mail questionnaires and subsequent follow-up structured telephone interviews. The questionnaire focused on questions that related to what youth read outside of school and why they read it, while the interviews enabled the researchers to probe deeper into issues raised by responses on the questionnaires. Although the survey was sent to 3,000 households, the researchers reported only 74 youth returned completed questionnaires, and of these only 37 were included in the telephone interviews.

Nearly half of the adolescents interviewed (n=17) reported reading for 1 to 3 hours each week outside of school, and personal tastes and recommendations from others most often influenced their decision with respect to what to read, when to read, and how to read. When friends were cited as influences by respondents, Moore et al. noted the following comments: "Sometimes they recommend things, and we often read the same things" (p. 174). Other respondents, however, mentioned that they did not talk to their friends about reading. In relation to the respondents' other influences, the researchers reported, "It was their parents who most frequently influenced their out-of-school reading" (p. 175). Parental influence involved recommending books, modeling good reading habits, and reading in their spare time. The researchers also reported a gradual decline in the influence of teachers on respondents' reading of materials not connected with school or required reading for school. The respondents also mentioned the Internet with respect to the kinds of reading they do mainly on their own.

This study presented valuable descriptive data suggesting that personal decisions strongly influence reading, which "complicates some of the earlier research on adolescents that suggests they are sensitive primarily to peer influences" (p. 178). Although the study offered some

insights with respect to the respondents' perceptions of what influences their reading, a deeper understanding of how adolescents typically use reading in their everyday lives as a socially situated practice is impossible given the limited nature of the sampling.

Summary of Important Findings from the Quantitative Studies

Although the studies reviewed above have contributed to our understanding of the reading habits, attitudes, and interests of large populations of adolescent and elementary students, these studies have limitations in that they offer an insufficiently nuanced understanding of students' perspectives on their own reading as they experience it their everyday lives. Specifically, large studies that use questionnaires as the primary source of data collection may fail to capture the unique and personal reasons behind adolescents' reading practices because they respond to adult-generated categories and descriptors. There are also concerns, as Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer (2006) point out, that the traditional view of reading set forth in many of the studies does not capture the reality of the variety of reading practices in which contemporary adolescents engage, and the large-scale studies may not capture the full continuum of practices. Thus, there are calls for an expanded vision of readers and a redefinition of how reading is considered by researchers, teachers, policymakers, society in general, and the children themselves. Although a number of large-scale studies address the use of computer technology, the majority do not explore students' involvement with new literacies but instead, view reading in a more narrow sense, as the ability to comprehend traditional print-based text material. Moreover, as Ross et al. (2006) remind us, "Large national surveys can go only so far" (p. 147), and "there is something about the experience of reading itself that eludes checklists and multiple choice questionnaires" (p. 147).

The large-scale studies tell us little about what reading means from the perspective of young people in the upper elementary grades with respect to the types of text they read, the places and purposes for reading, their social interactions with their peers in relation to their reading, and what they identify as reading in today's world of rapidly changing literacies. In order to understand children's perspectives on their reading as they experience it in their everyday lives, I turn to Greene and Hill (2005), who point out that "if the enquiry is on the quality of individual lives, statistical methods are not the method of choice since statistics serve to obliterate individuality and richness" (p. 4). Thus, given that statistical methods mask much of the complexity of reading and reading practices in order to establish what typical behaviours and practices are for a given population, in order to understand how adolescents perceive their reading practices it is important to examine and analyze studies where researchers ask them to explain their perspectives. In the next section, I examine smaller, qualitative studies that use interview methodologies as a primary form of data gathering.

Qualitative Studies That Examine Students' Perspectives on Their Reading

The studies included in this section explore reading from students' perspectives through the use of interviews. Unfortunately, most also adopt a traditional view of reading, defined narrowly as the ability to comprehend conventional print-based text, with text generally perceived as "written-down messages and symbols in the forms of books, magazines, and newspapers" (Larson, 2010, p. 15). These studies, however, inform my work because they shed light on the complex nature of the perceived reading decline and underscore the critical importance of listening to and exploring students' perspectives on their reading.

Bintz (1993) conducted open-ended interviews with 44 students in sixth to tenth grade in order to explore students' perspectives on their reading experiences in and out of school. His

findings demonstrated that “downward trends are complex, that no two students are exactly alike, and that all students possess unique histories as readers” (p. 612). In his attempt to explain the complexity of the problem, Bintz argued that the claim that many students lack an interest in reading “is somewhat reductionistic, overly simplistic, and largely inaccurate” (p. 613). Instead he found that students who lose interest in school reading do not necessarily lose interest in reading outside of school. He suggested that “students demonstrate not an explicit reluctance to read, but rather an implicit resistance to reading school-assigned materials” (p. 612). Bintz (1993) explained that much of the students’ dislike for school-based reading centered on the fact that students had little if any voice in creating reading curricula. In fact, many of the students responded that they read extensively at home and that they read a variety of materials, including magazines and informational texts, and that reading out of school was “meaningful, functional, and purposeful” (p. 611). Their out-of-school experiences were in contrast to school assigned reading, which, from the students’ perspectives, was “not meaningful or relevant to their school lives” (p. 613).

The work of Bintz (1993) demonstrates that resistance to reading is a complex problem with no simple causes or solutions. Bintz stressed that the practice of applying absolute labels such as avid, passive, and reluctant involves “simplistic representations and perpetuate false dichotomies” (p. 613). He proposed that we view readers instead “in terms of interpretive stances” (p. 613). He stated that “readers take different literate behaviors towards different types of reading tasks.” and “unlike labels, which connote a degree of permanence, interpretive stances shift constantly, depending on the social context as well as on the nature, purpose and function of the reading itself” (p. 613). His study is important for our understanding of adolescents’ reading given that it highlighted the importance of valuing students’ out-of-school reading practices

“rather than bemoaning what they are not reading in school” (p. 614). Bintz noted that the nature of the perceived reading decline is complex and that any future examinations of this phenomenon must focus on multiple factors rather than just the shortcomings of the readers themselves.

Although the study predates the Internet era and the varied ways reading is practiced in today’s technology-rich culture, Bintz brings to light the knowledge that any study of reading decline today must explore reading as a situated social practice. This can be accomplished not only by examining the reader and the context “but by exploring the complex tensions and transactions that occur between the two” (p. 614).

Like Bintz (1993), Ivey (1999) acknowledged that middle school readers are “complex and multidimensional” (p. 187). In her case study conducted over a period of five months for the purpose of exploring how three successful, moderately successful, or struggling sixth-grade readers experienced reading in their everyday lives in the classroom, Ivey found that “students’ dispositions towards reading varied according to context” (p. 187) even for the most successful readers. Ivey (1999) concluded that each individual in her study “was quite complex as a reader” (p. 173) and that his or her disposition towards reading varied depending on the context for reading, the reading materials used, and individual purposes for reading. Ivey (1999) concluded that her findings support the work of Bintz (1993), who criticized simplistic interpretations and commonly held beliefs about students who lose interest in reading after elementary school. Ivey (1999) surmised that if teachers are to understand the complexities of middle school readers and learn how best to help them to become lifelong independent readers, then they need to be “watching them, listening to them, and interacting with them in the context of meaningful literacy activities” (p. 190).

What do students prefer to read, and why? The following three studies explore the complex question of what students choose to read when given the opportunity to choose.

Recognizing the importance of “listening to students’ words and explanations” (p. 246), Worthy and McKool (1996) investigated the seemingly widespread phenomenon of capable readers who rarely choose to read in their leisure time, and they conducted a study with 11 sixth-graders who were identified by their teachers as reluctant readers after scoring negatively on a reading attitude survey. Data collection consisted of interviews that involved open-ended questions focusing on “leisure time habits, early reading experiences, previous and current school experiences, personal reading attitudes and habits, and preferences in reading materials” (p. 247). Students were shown a varied collection of traditional print material, such as novels, series books, school texts, comics, popular magazines, and humorous books, and were asked to rank the materials they would choose to read voluntarily in their leisure time. The researchers determined that “students’ reading attitudes were affected by their opportunities to read in personally interesting materials” (p. 249). Though the student participants “claimed to hate reading in general” (p. 251), the researchers noted that “All 11 spoke of strong extracurricular reading preferences” (p. 251). In conducting their study, the researchers noted how easy it was to find out what “so-called reluctant readers were interested in reading” (p. 251). The students enjoyed reading comics, popular magazines, or what others might consider to be “junk,” or light reading (Krashen, 2004). Similar to Ivey (1999) and Bintz (1993), Worthy and McKool (1996) concluded that “what [students] actually hate is a kind of reading that takes place only in school, a type of instruction in which they have little choice or voice in either activities or materials” (p. 253). The researchers observed that the teachers and librarians to whom they spoke “were either unaware of students’ preferences or chose to ignore them in favour of providing students with better

quality literature.” (p. 253). Although this study dealt only with printed works in the form of books, newspapers, comics, and magazines, this study continues to be relevant today because it highlights the importance of acknowledging students’ voice and choice in matters that affect their reading, and it reaffirms the need to place value on students’ out-of-school reading practices.

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) conducted follow-up interviews with 31 students as part of a large-scale survey of 1,765 sixth-grade students. This study favored traditional forms of text, as is evident in these sample questions: “1) What is your favorite book you read at home? 2) How do you find the books you like to read?” (p. 365). Though previous research had reported a resistance towards reading throughout the grades (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995), Ivey and Broaddus’s findings align with others (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Bintz, 1993; Ivey, 1999) who have asserted that students’ motivational profile for reading is complex, fluctuates, and is not an “all-or-nothing construct” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 366). The widest disparity found between in-school and out-of-school reading was in the range of diverse texts students reported reading out of school. Though the researchers asked about books only, they found varied types of books. Ivey and Broaddus’s work argued that, when students voice their personal interests in their reading, “they make quite a different impression” (p. 350), specifically that they are, in fact, avid readers of varied types of text despite teachers’ perceptions to the contrary. The researchers’ findings challenge current in-school reading practices and illuminate a need to re-frame the reading curriculum to make reading in school more productive and relevant for students. For example, if the goal of literacy instruction was to allow students to explore their own reading interests in order to create engaged readers, “middle schools may be missing the mark” (p. 350),

meaning that schools need to create space for students to have opportunities to have their voices heard.

Coles and Hall (2002) highlighted the importance of a school reading curriculum that is responsive to students' reading preferences and emphasized the importance of acknowledging "the vernacular literacies which are so often discounted in the school context" (p. 104). In follow-up interviews with 87 children from a survey of 7,976 British children aged 10 to 14 years, wherein the researchers used an adapted questionnaire from an earlier 1971 study, which they say "allowed a comparison of children's reading habits over a period of a quarter of a century" (p. 99), Coles and Hall claimed that "Popular anxiety about an overall decline in the amount of children's book reading is unfounded" (p. 99). Data collected showed that the reported frequency of book reading had increased over two decades for both 10-year-old boys and girls and 12-year-old girls but remained the same for 12-year-old boys and 14-year-old girls. Coles and Hall (2002) found that "literacy practices are highly gendered, especially as children move towards adolescence, and [are] influenced by cultural background" (p. 104). They argued that boys' vernacular literacies are serving boys rather well but that the school system is failing to recognize or capitalize on this (p. 106-107). Coles and Hall (2002) recognized that "those who work with young people will be at a disadvantage in understanding their responses to literature and reading unless they have some understanding of, and interest in, the reading culture that those young people are busy constructing and reconstructing in their everyday lives" (p. 97). This study highlights the concern that "school definitions of literacy have been slow to change and slow to acknowledge the changing nature of literacy in society" (p. 106). These findings have implications for my study because the researchers acknowledged the importance of exploring reading as a socially situated practice.

New Literacy Studies

Recent studies have begun to recognize the changing nature of reading and to explore reading from the students' perspectives through the lens of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) approach. Proponents of this approach view reading as a social practice and draw attention to the literacy event, to identity construction, and to the dynamics and centrality of textually mediated communities of practice (Barton, 1994, 2001; Gee, 1996, 2010; Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1993, 2003). These studies inform my work because they address reading from a sociocultural perspective, as an artifact of culture, and situate reading as a social practice, and this view of reading is aligned with my personal views. NLS scholars acknowledge that the nature of reading changes as the cultural context changes. With media and researchers raising concern about adolescents' disinterest in reading, these studies are an important counterpoint because they argue and demonstrate that adolescents' interest in reading is not declining, but that the nature of their reading practices is changing in today's world of rapidly changing literacies and digitized cultures.

Blair and Sanford (2004) conducted an ethnographic study of early adolescent boys in six urban and rural settings over the course of two years to document and explain boys' literacy practices. They explored the boys' literacy practices and interactions with text in order to learn how their practices may be different from the more traditional notions of school-based literacy. Using multiple data collection sources, which included interviews, observations, writing, drawing, and "literacy digs" (gathering artifacts of students' reading), Blair and Sanford's (2004) aim was to "better understand the functional nature of their everyday school texts" (p. 454). They concluded that although the boys "struggled to make meaning of their school literacy experiences, they talked enthusiastically about their literacy practices outside of school" (p. 454).

The researchers introduced the term “morphing” to conceptualize the varied ways the boys “adapt and reshape” their school literacy practices out in the playground, hallways, and classroom in order to “suit their needs” (p. 454). Blair and Sanford found that boys do read when given the opportunity to choose reading materials that they find enjoyable and purposeful, and that their choices “inform their personal interests, feed their quest for their individual and collective identities and social communities” (p. 458). The researchers observed that “for these boys literacy was a dominant social practice through which the boys shaped their identities and developed and maintained close personal relationships” (p. 457). Through their observations and interviews, the researchers learned that “one of the most critical aspects of literacy for [boys] is the social-cultural capital gained from the texts they read and share[d]” (p. 458). *Social-cultural capital*, conceptualized by Bourdieu, (1991), was realized in Blair and Sanford’s study as “the relationships buil[t] around information-passing that developed through the shared activities around text that included literacy events such as ‘figuring out how something works, keeping track of sports statistics, or staying connected with friends’” (p. 458). In essence, the reading material became the “currency” the boys used to develop and maintain social connections “and by doing so, they continued to create their [gendered] identities” (p. 457). They elaborated, “It is through their stories and explanations that we have been able, albeit, briefly, to enter their lived and fantasized world of transformation and morphing” (p. 459). Blair and Sanford acknowledged several limitations to their studies, including the need to explore the connections between boys’ in- and out-of-school literacies in order to better “understand some of the complex ways in which they engage in text” (p. 459). They reminded readers that “there are multiple definitions of literacy and multiple paths to becoming literate” (p. 459), and this research, as they pointed out, “has implications for girls’ literacies and futures” (p. 459).

Taking a situated approach to the study of literacy (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000) and drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) notions of *habitus* and *cultural capital*, Love and Hamston (2003) explored how boys, identified as reluctant readers, engaged in aspects of their family's leisure reading practices. Of particular interest to Love and Hamston was the role parents continued to play in "mediating reading as a cultural practice in the home, with their teenage sons" (p. 162). Expanding on the narrow print-based definitions of reading, and thereby acknowledging the realities and the range of the boys' multimodal texts and digital culture, the researchers were particularly interested in the nature and scope of the teenage boys' existing multiliteracy practices, and specifically "how the boys and their families negotiate leisure reading practices across the various modes" (p. 163), with a focus on how families in different ways "guide their sons into appropriating specific leisure reading practices" (p. 167). Love and Hamston reported that they were able to persuade the boys to be in the study not by focusing on their deficits as readers but by having the boys talk about their "existing leisure reading" (p. 166). They found that "Tom," like the majority of the "screenagers," (a term they borrowed from Luke & Luke, 2001, to mean a childhood electronically mediated by the Internet and digital technology) in the study, who identified themselves as being "not keen readers," all failed to recognize their reading of electronic text as reading. Their parents also never recognized electronic technologies as a form of reading, and "like their sons, they presume[d] that reading applies only to the privileged and privileging forms of print text (such as novels and newspapers)" (p. 163). Viewing leisure reading from this narrow perspective, the researchers explained, "has repercussions for the ways in which boys position themselves as readers in their teenage years, for the ways in which parents position themselves to guide their sons into those forms of reading which are privileged . . . and for the ways in which boys and their parents

negotiate conflicts arising from these different positions” (p. 164). The researchers found that up until the early years of adolescence, the boys begrudgingly appropriated the privileged text, while in the later-middle years of adolescence they “generally resist appropriating family reading dispositions” (p. 161), which resulted in “many of the boys being labeled by their teachers and parents, as ‘reluctant readers’” (p. 164).

Love and Hamston (2003) provided three main constructs about boys’ reading and argued the following:

- 1) the notion of reading reluctance as a single deficit-oriented construct requires closer examination when applied to teenage boys who are capable readers;
- 2) the value to parents of recognizing the agency of teenage boys as they differentially ‘take from’ (a term they borrowed from Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998) the range of leisure reading texts available to them in their social fields; and,
- 3) curriculum developers need to examine more closely and critically what constitutes ‘valued leisure reading’ in current times in order to reconcile the role of traditionally valued practices and texts with the role in school curriculum of the multi-modal and semiotically complex forms of reading typically preferred by ‘screenage’ boys. (pp. 164–165).

Love and Hamston’s (2003) study reveals the “monolithic, deficit-oriented concept of reading reluctance [that still exists] when applied to reading and teenage boys who are capable readers” (p. 173), which is a disservice to boys’ reading development. Yet educators and parents, as powerful role models, can “negotiate pathways between traditionally valued print-based literacy practices and the increasingly more multi-modal literacy practices valued by teenage boys, practices whose status in the home and the school is uncertain” (p. 161). Love and

Hamston advocated for curriculum developers to “design programs that examine the forms of leisure reading valued by a range of adolescent males in the contemporary digital culture” (p. 174). From my perspective, and from the aim of my study, the findings also point to the need to explore not just how boys but also girls use reading in their everyday lives in today’s rapidly changing times.

In order to debunk the prevailing myth that kids don’t read, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris (2008) investigated the reading practices of sixth-, eighth-, and ninth-grade students to determine what, how often, and why students chose to read the texts they read. Based on the interview, survey, and ethnographic data, the researchers concluded that the majority of the youth in the study did read and that they read regularly, though they did not read the types of texts adults typically value. The youth generally did not read novels. They did, however, read websites, letters and notes, music lyrics, email, magazines, and novels. Drawing from a theoretical perspective that situates reading as a socially situated and mediated practice, the researchers concluded that youth were motivated to read when it offered them *social capital* in the form of “gaining information, ideas for self-improvement, models for identities, or ways to maintain existing relationships and build new ones” (p. 147). This study emphasized reading as a socially situated practice and underscored the notion that youth do read and that their motivation to read centres on the maintenance of social networks, identity work, and self-improvement.

To explore what it means for boys to be literate (both reading and writing), Kelly’s (2010) ethnographic study examined how seventh-graders in a rural farm setting understand and practice multiple literacies in their everyday lives in today’s changing world. The data collection involved gathering both traditional print and digital artifacts and conducting interviews and conversations, which revealed that, although the six boys led very literate lives outside of school,

the in-school settings were “carefully micromanaged . . . and the almost exclusive use of printed text” (p. 192). Kelly (2010) found a disconnect between the boys’ prevailing views on literacy as a skill and their ability to read and write in their everyday life, where “literacy [was] an activity embedded within their social and cultural contexts” (p. 194). In their everyday use of literacy, Kelly (2010) found that the boys constructed their identity in the way Gee (2000) conceptualized – that is, as “specific ways of thinking, believing, valuing, acting, interacting, and often, ways of coordinating and being coordinated by other people, objects, tools, setting, technologies” (p. 413). The out-of-school literacies in which the boys engaged were “transactional and motivated by personal and group interests” (p. 192) and included a diverse range of both traditional print-based text (magazines, newspaper, flyers, sports statistics) and multimodal text. The emphasis in school was on the more traditional print-based text, which served as the “privileged” text and was seen “as more valuable” (p. 193), rather than the texts they read recreationally. Aligning her approach with social constructivist ideas, Kelly explained that the boys constructed their personal knowledge and understandings of their world in their out-of-school literacies as a way for them to “practice their cultural identities as rural male adolescents” (p. 191). This led Kelly to conclude that only when educators find opportunities to bridge in- and out-of-school literacies and view literacy as a social practice will adolescents “embrace school-based print literacy and make it a part of their lives” (abstract).

Knoester (2010) examined the importance of social interaction and relationship building amongst both boys and girls. In his grounded theory study, he explored reading as a social practice with 10 fifth- through seventh-grade students and found that “reading books and other forms of reading were tied to social interactions” (p. 6). In interviews, students revealed that they enjoyed talking about the books they were reading and selected topics they could discuss with

their social group, which included peers, siblings, and friends. The core conclusion emerging from the data was that “choosing to read for these adolescents, was connected to desires to cultivate relationships” (p. 7). He wondered whether the term “independent reading” “might be a misnomer” (p. 7) because the “adolescents strategically selected, read, discussed, and avoided literature based on the relationships they hoped to cultivate” (p. 7). Although Knoester’s study was limited to a small number of participants, it underscores the importance of examining independent reading as a social activity and further stresses the need to explore the nuances of the social aspects of reading in students’ everyday lives, and particularly their desire to cultivate relationships.

The next three studies are included because they highlight young people’s contemporary reading practices with digital text and contribute to the growing body of research on new literacies. The first study offers invaluable data on youth’s media use, the second reveals that youth’s digital reading practices are complex, and the last highlights the importance of Rosenblatt’s (1978) reader response theory to the transaction between reader and digital text.

In a large U.S. three-year ethnographic study of youth media use, Ito, Horst, Bittanti, et al. (2008) interviewed over 800 participants and conducted 5,000 hours of online observations (on sites such as Facebook, MySpace, etc.) in order to understand new media engagement. Research methods included questionnaires, surveys, semi-structured interviews, discussion forums, diary studies, observations and content analysis of media sites, profiles, videos, and materials from classroom and afterschool contexts. In piecing together a more holistic picture of the role of new media in young people’s lives, Ito and her colleagues were interested in understanding how these new media practices are embedded in the broader social and cultural ecology. Many adults lament that youth today are wasting time online, texting, or playing video

games (Ito et al., 2008). Ito and her team sought to examine and challenge this widespread perception and provide extensive data to explain why today's youth find these activities so compelling and important in their everyday lives. Their study was motivated by two main research questions: 1) How are new media being integrated into youth practices and agendas? 2) How do these practices change the dynamics of youth-adult negotiations over literacy, learning, and authoritative knowledge? (p. 1). The major findings were that youth use online media to 1) extend friendships and interests and 2) engage in peer-based, self-directed learning online. In what they call "friendship driven practices, the researchers found that youth use new media to "hang out" and that "youth are almost always associating with people they already know in their offline lives" (p. 1). Through various *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICT's) (instant messaging, Facebook, etc.), youth are in constant contact with their friends, and in this way their practices are highly collaborative and socially situated. They also found that youth use online media to explore their interests and to find information. They explained that these "interest-driven networks" enable youth "to connect to new peers beyond their local community who share specialized interests whether that is on-line gaming, creative writing, video editing, or other artistic endeavors" (p. 1). They pointed out that unlike "hanging out," where the desire is to maintain social connections with friends, youth used ICTs for self-directed learning, for "messing around" with new forms of media, and in the process they acquired new media skills and various forms of technical and media literacy. The researchers described youth's everyday new media practices as "genres of participation" and used the term "geeking out" to describe youth's engagement with media and technology that is "intense, autonomous, and interest driven" (p. 28), and is not driven primarily by local friendships. It is driven, instead, by specialized knowledge groups more globally, where the goal is on improving their craft

(expertise in specific areas of interest) and establishing a reputation among expert peers. This study illustrated how varied new forms of media have changed how youth socialize and learn and has some implications for parents, policymakers, and educators to consider. The first is the need for teachers to facilitate young people's engagement with digital media. Ito et al. (2008) pointed out that roadblocks meant to block participation in online media practices serve to deprive youth from picking up basic social and technical skills that they need to fully participate in contemporary society. Secondly, to stay relevant and to keep up with the rapid changes in digital media, the authors challenged educators to think about the role of education and to ask themselves what it would mean to really exploit the potential of the learning opportunities available through online resources and networks. The researchers concluded that the digital world has captured youth's attention because it has created opportunities for them to "grapple with social norms, explore interests, develop technical skills, and experiment with new forms of self-expression" and has provided them with "avenues for extending social worlds, self-directed learning, and independence" (p. 1). The work of Ito et al. (2008) demonstrates "that social network and video-sharing sites, online games, and gadgets like iPods and mobile phones are now fixtures of youth culture" (p. 1). This study informed my work because it illustrated how new forms of digital media are embedded in daily life, and it demonstrated young people's engagement with digital text as being purposeful, relevant, and fulfilling specific functions in their everyday lives.

In order to understand the complexities of reading online, Rowsell and Burke (2009) conducted a case study to explore the digital reading practices of two middle school literacy learners and documented their literacy interests, motivations, and practices. Using a data collection method that included stimulated recall, the researchers asked the participants to talk

through their actions and movements as they navigated and explored their chosen websites. Two websites, *Naruto* and *Webkinz*, were selected, the first being described by the researchers as a site that “carries a storyline and can be viewed as a televisual online text or videogame” (p. 110), and the latter, “an interactive site where users find an online identity and community through their stuffed animal avatars” (p. 110). The researchers used a multimodal framework consisting of four layers of analysis (discourse, design, production, distribution), which they used to explore the participants’ online reading. Rowsell and Burke noted that when using a multimodal framework as a lens to view digital literacy, the reading path plays a central role as it “charts a reader’s trajectory through text both printed and digital.” The researchers pointed out that “the challenge for online readers lies in the composition of the webpage: Where does the reader first look on the screen and where does that lead him or her?” (p. 107). The study revealed that reading traditional linear print differs from reading digital print because the latter demands a different set of skills. The researchers explained that “digital media adds new layers, like complex visuals, the dynamism of the storyline, and the related texts and supporting genres that accompany the story” (p. 115). They suggested that “the reading skills used by students to bring meaning to their digital practices are much more intricate than might be thought” (p. 116-17). This study led the researchers to conclude that “digital texts depend more readily on the design and representation of language and thus require a semiotic understanding on the part of the reader” (p. 117) than do traditional print text forms. The study emphasized the importance of teachers’ understanding of the complexities of reading online and that without this understanding “educators are only scratching the surface of their students’ learning capacities” (p. 117). This study has implications for my study because it acknowledges the complex nature of digital

reading practices that have captured the attention of today's youth, and it highlights the need to place a higher value on their online gaming practices in the discussion of literacy practices.

Berg (2011) conducted an ethnographic study of adolescent youth aged 11 to 18 in a library located in a Midwestern city in the U.S. over the course of two years to document young people's online text use. To accomplish this, Berg explored how young people talk about the texts they read online and examined how computers provided a basis for live conversations. Using a Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) as a data collection method together with field notes and observations of online activity, Berg collected data of frequently used websites in three ways: "1) teens verbally identified them; 2) researcher visually monitored them; and, 3) researcher asked teens which websites they visited" (p. 487). Subsequent interviews with eight teens were conducted after five months of observation. From the discourse transcripts, Berg identified five patterns of online text use in the youth's conversations around computer use 1) text as reference, 2) text as authority, 3) text as experience, 4) text as expression, and 5) text as instrument. When the teens talked about the texts, interesting parallels emerged between new media and traditional print, and these findings demonstrated that teens "call upon electronic texts in traditional ways" (p. 488). Berg referenced Rosenblatt's (1978) Readers' Transactional Response Theory to identify two of the five patterns of text use that emerged in teens' conversations. For example, Rosenblatt argues that readers make sense of text through personal meaning-making experiences and perform different activities depending on their focus of attention. In other words, a reader's purpose influences how he or she interacts or transacts with text. Though Rosenblatt's theory never explicitly addressed transactions between readers and digital text, Berg used it to shed light on two patterns of text use: 1) text as authority and 2) text as experience. When readers invest authority in a text, they are reading for information, or

engaging in what Rosenblatt calls “efferent reading,” and when readers infuse an emotional response, or “text as experience,” it is essentially “aesthetic reading.” In light of the perception that teachers fear that traditional literacy practices are vanishing, Berg argued that her study demonstrated that youth draw on familiar (print-based) practices when using *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICTs) out of school, and this therefore has broader implications for teaching. One simple change that teachers can make is to design the physical arrangement of the classroom to encourage students’ interactions around electronic texts, to promote new socially situated literacy practices (p. 492). Berg encouraged teachers and students to collaborate both in physical space and cyberspace, stressed the importance of accessing sites that create classrooms that are more participatory, and called for teachers to become advocates for students to access the websites they want to use. As a way to build a bridge between the old and the new literacies, Berg underscored the importance for teachers to take a genuine interest in and value their students’ out-of-school digital text practices and to encourage their students to discuss their everyday reading practices.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the relevant literature that pertains directly to the topic of children’s varied interests in reading. It began with a brief synopsis of the history of reading, books, and text in an attempt to highlight reading as an artifact of culture. Next were studies that have been conducted to study adolescents’ reading habits, attitudes, and interests. The studies were divided into three sections: the first provided an overview of large-scale studies that use questionnaires and surveys methods; the second provided a review of studies that explored students’ perspectives and used interviews as the primary method of data collection; and the third provided a review of New Literacy Studies (NLS) that view reading as a situated social practice.

The discussion of the literature sets the context for my own study of what it means to be a young reader in today's technology-rich culture. The research literature also highlights the critical importance of listening to young people's perspectives on their reading in order to understand the complex ways they engage with text today and to understand the complexities of reading as a situated social practice through the lens of the New Literacy Studies.

In the next chapter I outline the study methodology and provide a detailed summary of the research design, methodological details, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations as well as the study limitations. The interpretive inquiry methodology provides the structure that has enabled me to explore students' perspectives on their own reading and to learn how students use reading in their everyday lives.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In response to my theoretical position that reading is a social practice that encompasses many literacy practices, including non-traditional print resources, I designed a qualitative study to explore students' perspectives on their own reading. My intention was to explore how students use reading in their everyday lives and my aim was to discover and describe the types of texts they read, the places and purposes they have for reading, the people who influence their reading and their social interactions with peers and others that they experience in relation to their reading.

In this chapter I outline the research design for my study. The first section describes qualitative interpretive inquiry methodology and the researcher's role. The second section describes the methodological procedures and considerations and addresses the following aspects: gaining access, research site, and participation selection. The third and fourth sections describe my data collection and analysis methods. The last section outlines the ethical considerations that affect my study and the study limitations.

Qualitative Research and Interpretive Inquiry

Description and Rationale for Research Design

The impetus to undertake a study to understand students' realities from their perspective was most appropriately addressed by way of a qualitative interpretive inquiry methodology that allows access into children's experiential life. In the current study I used qualitative interpretive inquiry to advance my understanding of students' experiences and to make sense of what is important to them, what they care about, and what motivates their reading practices (Ellis, 1998b). The phenomenon of interest to this inquiry is the practices of reading in children's

everyday lives. I feel qualitative interpretive inquiry best reflects my personal beliefs about research with children and the goals of the study. In the next paragraph, I will further explain and describe the qualitative interpretive inquiry methodology and my reasons for choosing it as the methodology for my study.

Qualitative research is “based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds,” and as such qualitative research is “pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described qualitative research as primarily naturalistic, descriptive, inductive, and having an emphasis on process and meaning. In its most basic form, Merriam (1998) characterized qualitative research as a process of “seek[ing] to discover and to understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (p. 11). The aim of qualitative research is to make sense of how people’s everyday world works, how they construct and make sense of their world, and how they experience their world (Merriam, 1998). Integral to qualitative research is an understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researchers’. These are referred to as the “*emic*, or insider’s perspective” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Mayan (2009) pointed out that qualitative research “is not unidirectional, it is relational...an act of engagement where the researcher affects the setting and the setting affects the researcher” (p. 134). A key characteristic of qualitative research is its use of an inductive research method, whereby the findings emerge in the themes, concepts, and categories the researcher inductively derives from the data. As a qualitative researcher “I am not piecing together a puzzle whose picture I already know, but more shaping the pictures as I go along while collecting and examining the parts” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 32). The work of a qualitative researcher, as Mayan (2009) so vividly articulated, is “not to limit a phenomenon –

make it neat, tidy, and comfortable – but to break it open, unfasten, or interrupt it so that a description of the phenomenon, in all of its contradictions, messiness, and depth, is (re)presented” (p. 11).

Interpretive Inquiry

My primary interest as a qualitative researcher is in understanding lived experiences from the participants’ perspectives. Further to this, as an interpretive inquirer, my interest is in maintaining the spirit of good faith and genuine concern. Ellis (1998b) suggests that interpretive inquirers “begin with an openness to behold or contemplate life in its wholeness and complexity” (p. 19). To start the process, one must begin with an entry question, one that “preoccupies, mystifies and most importantly, makes you wish you could make a difference” (Ellis, 1998b, p. 19). To truly understand the interpretive inquiry approach is to “let go and care more about the person in front of you than the questions or topic itself” (J. Ellis, classroom notes, November 20, 2010). Thus, it is through my participants’ rich, thick descriptions of their world in action in the form of words and stories, “where nothing is trivial” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 30) that I wished to understand the ways they experience reading in their everyday lives. The participants’ experiences of reading and what is important to them, what they care about, and what their motivations behind their behaviors are can best be expressed and understood through the interpretive inquiry process approach (J. Ellis, classroom notes, November 20, 2010). Interpretive inquiry is best understood in the tradition of hermeneutics, which refers to an interpretive process where the inquirer endeavors to gain a holistic understanding of participants’ experiences. To approach research from a hermeneutic perspective, one must have pre-understandings of the ways of conceiving this formal research process (Ellis, 1998b). Prasad (2005) suggested that “the notion of hermeneutics remains extraordinarily pervasive in

qualitative research, often being used interchangeably with that of interpretation” (p. 30). Smith (1991) offered an important distinction, noting that hermeneutics “is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it” (p. 201), which means “it is not out there awaiting discovery, but is brought into being through an act of understanding” (J.K. Smith, 1993, p. 195). In the process of “deepening our collective understanding” (Smith, 1991, p. 187), which is achieved jointly by both the inquirer and participant, Smith (1991) emphasizes that “meaning resides neither with an author nor within a set of objective historical conditions. Rather meaning is brought into being and is constantly shaped and reshaped, as a result of the continuing dialogical encounter between and among people – inquirers included” (p. 186). Ellis (1998b) visualized the “flow and unfolding quality of the interpretive inquiry process” (p. 16) as a series of loops in a spiral, with each loop representing a different data collection or analysis activity as a way to get closer to what you hope to understand (Ellis, class notes, October 23, 2010). Each loop or exploration generates findings and involves a different activity, analysis, re-interpretation, or re-framed question that is influenced by what was revealed in the previous loop (Ellis, 1998b).

The hermeneutic/interpretive spiral as a series of loops was first inspired by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who envisioned three inherent themes, and it was later articulated as the “hermeneutic circle” (Smith, 1991, p. 190), and the circle is a key metaphor in the hermeneutics methodological approach. A challenge for interpretive inquirers in using a hermeneutic framework is to understand that “the interpreter is part of the circle or context within which the interpretation must be realized” (Smith, 1993, p. 187). Thus, “everybody is somebody or has a place in the world and can only attempt to interpret the expressions of others from that particular place in the world” (p.187). Additionally, “everybody has certain or particular interests, values and purposes that are brought to the interpretation of the expression of others” (p. 187). Because

the researcher is part of the research context and not separate, and because a researcher's interests and values influence his or her interpretations, inquirers must enter the circle in the right way (Packer & Addison, 1989) with an "openness, humility, and genuine engagement" (Ellis, 1998b, p. 18).

What one learns from each loop in the spiral in the hermeneutic circle of inquiry may cause change in the research interpretations, re-direct the study, or present surprises or "uncoverings" (Ellis, 1998b, p. 22). Although what was uncovered in the inquiry may not provide solutions, they may awaken the researcher to understand the phenomenon or to re-frame the questions being asked. As Ellis (1998b) explained, "if no surprises occur, we either do not yet 'see' what can be uncovered, or we have not yet approached the research participant or situation in a way that respects the way it can show itself" (p. 23).

Ellis (2006) and Smith (1991) outlined the three key themes that guided my understanding of the interpretive inquiry and that are central to the hermeneutic circle of inquiry. They are: 1) *the creative character of interpretation*; 2) *the whole to part micro/macro relationship*; and 3) *the pivotal role of language and history*. The first theme reflects that interpretive work is holistic rather than prescriptive in an effort "to discern the intent or meaning behind another's expression" (Ellis, 2006, p. 115) as opposed to experiences reduced to researcher-imposed categories. I began my study with a holistic rather than a prescribed manner because inherent in interpretive inquiry is the understanding that inquiry must "begin with an openness to behold or contemplate life in its wholeness and complexity" (Ellis, 1998b, p. 19). The second theme in the hermeneutic circle was described by Ellis (1998b) as the backward and forward movement from the specific to the general, from the part to the whole, from the micro to the macro, in "a movement that has no natural starting or end point" (p. 16). Ellis agreed with

Smith (1993), who maintained that “good interpretation can only be pursued with a constant movement back and forth between the expression and the web of meaning within which that expression is lodged” (p, 16). Ellis (1998a) writes “what one can see at any given time is limited by one’s vantage point, or what in hermeneutics is called one’s horizon. It means one’s prejudices.” (p.8). As I embarked on the hermeneutic circle, and in the forward and backward arc of inquiry, I was cognizant that I could not deny my own pre’s – pre-understanding, pre-conceptions – as I made sense of and interpreted the data. Instead, as Smith (1993) explains, “when one encounters another, it is not a matter of abandoning one’s own standpoint and grasping that of the other. On the contrary, a dialogical encounter of questions and answers is a fusion of horizons.” (p. 196).

The third theme inherent in understanding human behavior is the role of language and how it reflects a time and place in history, tradition, or community that can either enable or limit the researcher’s interpretations (Ellis, 2006). As highlighted by Ellis (2006), “because language is such a significant element in the construction of understanding, it is important for researchers to give careful attention to the language used by themselves and by participants in their research” (p. 117). In my study, I was mindful of the language I used as I phrased my questions and in my conversations with my participants, as the fusion of horizons takes place through language since our horizons are linguistic (Ellis, 1998a). My understanding is that while the interpretive inquiry process can raise new questions and concerns for the researcher, it is ultimately about acquiring insight leading to new ideas for helpful action. As Ellis (1998a) pointed out, “The aim of interpretive inquiry is not to write the end of an existing story but to write a more hopeful beginning for new stories” (p. 10). To position myself as a qualitative researcher in the social constructivist paradigm, as an interpretive inquirer, is to be interested in the experience and

sense-making behind an individual's behaviors and actions, and is to have a commitment to the hermeneutical tradition to research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I was mindful of my understanding of qualitative research, interpretive inquiry, and hermeneutics in both the design and conduct of my study. It was by taking these first steps into the interpretative inquiry process that I aimed to discover the possibilities for advancing my understandings of what I genuinely care to learn about: What are the perspectives of early adolescent students on their reading in their everyday lives?

Role of the Researcher

Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that in qualitative research “the researcher needs to know who he [*sic*] is and what he is doing in the setting” (p. 48). As a constructivist researcher and interpretive inquirer, I have a genuine interest in and value children's perspective. According to Greene and Hill (2005), researching children's perspectives implies “a respect for each child as a unique and valued experiencer of his or her world” (p. 3). Greene and Hill (2005) emphasize that “the researcher who values children's perspectives and wishes to understand their lived experiences will be motivated to find out more about how children understand and interpret, negotiate and feel about their daily lives” (p. 3). This position further implies “the use of methods that can capture the nature of children's lives as lived rather than those taking children out of their everyday lives” (p. 3-4). As James, Jenk, and Prout (1998) have argued, to carry out research with children, it is important that the research understands the child as a “being”; that is, as a person in his or her own right, with social status and “a course of action, a set of needs – in sum, “as a social actor” (p. 207), “where children's social worlds are real places that are meaningful” (p. 28). As Bloome and Katz (2003) have articulated, “what can be known about children depends on how “child” is conceptualized, the personhood assigned to the category of

‘child’” (p. 382). The children in my study are identified as the experts in matters that affect their reading lives.

To be a qualitative researcher means to give voice and “to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Integral to the role of the qualitative researcher is an understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s. In my role as observer as participant, I conducted my study with the intention to approach my research question with humility and goodwill, with the goal of getting closer to my participants’ perspectives and horizons and to hear their voices so that I could come to understand how they make sense of their reading experiences.

Describing and making sense of the meaning of people’s lives drives the qualitative researcher to engage in a multi-method, flexible approach to field work through detailed interviews and observations, and to use a variety of data collection techniques, with the “hope to always get a better fix on the subject matter at hand” (p. 2). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) position the role of inquirer as the bricoleur and describe the multi-method approach to qualitative inquiry as a bricolage. When applied to qualitative research, the term bricoleur is described as “a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2), and in the inquiry the bricoleur produces a bricolage, or a “pieced-together, close knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation” (p. 2). Positioned as bricoleur, I have a variety of methodological tools and techniques to choose from. These methods include but are not limited to interviews, conversations, observations, artifacts, and personal narrative stories, which I can have some flexibility with as they are not set in advance but are dependent on the questions asked and the situated context of my participants. As a bricoleur I acknowledge that

research is an “interactive process shaped by the personal history, biography, gender, social class and ethnicity of the people in the study, and therefore not value free” (p. 3). I understand that because of the interactive nature of the research, I am not separate from it and objective, and as such I am aware that my own personal history and attitudes will influence my interpretation. Because I positioned myself as bricoleur, I also accepted a moral personal responsibility to interpret, understand, tell stories, and re-present participants’ lived experiences with a mindful concern (emotionality), authentic insights (verisimilitude), and a respectfulness (ethic of care) of concern from which to hear my participants’ voices (multi-voiced text) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) while I construct knowledge about reading in the everyday lives of my participants. In my interviews with my five participants, I made every effort to listen more deeply, talk less frequently, and to reflect and observe mindfully to connect the parts to the whole and to piece together our shared stories that, when woven together, present the tapestry of our labor, a bricolage.

Merriam (1998) stated that the qualitative researcher “is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data” (p. 20). This means that as a researcher I decide who will participate in my research, which data to collect, which questions to ask, and what is important to note (Mertens, 1998). I must be prepared for a certain amount of ambiguity and sensitivity in the data collection and analysis phase, and I must be a good communicator (Merriam, 1998). As Merriam (1988) pointed out, the researcher must also understand that “the best way to proceed will not always be obvious” (p. 20). She compared the role of a qualitative researcher to a detective, and she stressed, “It takes time and patience to search for clues, to follow up leads, to find the missing pieces, and to put the puzzle together” (p. 21). Sensitivity in the data collection

phase entails “being alert to the cues” (p. 22) and involves “knowing when to allow for silence, when to probe more deeply, and when to change direction” (p. 22).

Fundamental to the role of qualitative inquirer is the notion of reflexivity. Finlay (2002) described reflexivity as “thoughtful, conscious self-awareness” (p. 532). Reflexivity is often confused with reflection, which is understood as “thinking about” (p. 532) and “takes places after the event” (p. 532). Reflexivity, as Finlay highlighted, “taps into a more immediate, continuing, dynamic, and subjective self-awareness.” Mayan (2009) defined reflexivity as the “process of being highly attentive to how and why you make decisions and interpretations along the research way, critically examining your personal researcher role and how this interfaces with all – even the most minute – aspects of the research” (p. 137). Finlay acknowledged that “lived experiences can never be fully grasped in their immediate manifestation, with reflexive analysis,” (p. 533), but rather “the researcher is aware of experiencing a world and moves back and forth in a kind of dialectic between experience and awareness” (p. 533). Hertz (1997) maintains that “to be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment” (p. viii).

In contemplating my role as interpretive inquirer upon entering the forward arc, I was mindful about the role of fore-structure; the way perspectives, horizons, and pre-understandings play out; and the implications of these for my study. I found Smith’s (1991) quotation helpful as it relates to the hermeneutic agenda. He emphasized that “the purpose is not to translate my subjectivity out of the picture but to take it up with a new sense of responsibility – to make proposals about the world we share with the aim of deepening our collective understanding of it” (p. 201). Like all interpretive inquirers before me, I entered the forward arc with my own purposes, interests, and pre-existing set of pre’s – prejudgments, preconceptions, and prejudices

– that would guide my interpretation (Packer & Addison, 1989). I was assured by reading Smith (1991) that pre-judgment is both natural and necessary because it reflects the researcher’s own world view and creates a starting place from which conversation with participants can occur and from which new understandings can be constructed with participants.

It was through my conversations with my participants that I hoped to understand their fore-structures and to begin to understand their world and in the process to establish a “fusion of horizons” (p. 193) into a “new understanding.” As I entered the backward arc of the hermeneutic circle, I was mindful to remember that Ellis (1998b) challenged me to reconsider “the interpretation by re-examining the data for confirmation, contradictions, gaps or inconsistencies . . . in an attempt to see what went unseen before” (p. 26).

In my role as researcher, I made a deliberate effort to search for as “coherent, comprehensive, and comprehensible” (Ellis, 1998b, p. 26) an interpretation as possible. Critical to interpretive inquiry is the return arc of the hermeneutic circle and the response to inquiry. I knew that as a researcher I would encounter the unexpected or surprising uncoverings that might prompt me to re-examine my questions and alter my direction. In taking the holistic view, there is a danger for the researcher to become judgmental and to miss other uncoverings in the micro-look at the research findings (Boostrom, 1994). The consequences of getting caught up in emotions and making premature assumptions is what Boostrom (1994) cautioned novice qualitative researchers in the role of *observer as evaluator* to be aware of and to avoid, since judgments can “quickly close the situation” (p. 56). Prasad’s writing (2005) encouraged me to put my “trust in the application of hermeneutic circle to illuminate our understanding of its context” (p. 35). Through the process of analyzing the micro and macro data and in looking for deeper answers and posing new questions about what it all means to my participants, I moved

into the role of subjective inquirer (Boostrom, 1994). In the role afforded to a subjective inquirer, my understanding is transformed as “I move inside the events I am trying to describe” (p. 58). Finally, in the role of subjective inquirer my aim is to “talk about all the implications of what we have achieved” (p. 58) – rich, descriptive, storied accounts of my participants’ experiences of reading in their everyday lives. To achieve this, Ellis (1998b) advised researchers such as myself to persist in the interpretive inquiry process and to explore the successive loops of data collection, interpretation, and analysis, “as the task at hand is to articulate the most coherent and comprehensive account of what one can learn from the sum of the inquiries” (p. 26).

Methodological Details

Gaining Access

In undertaking a research study with children, researchers often find that adult gatekeepers are usually the first point of entry to gain access and consent (Hill, 2005). Gaining access as a qualitative researcher is more than obtaining access and the necessary permissions to collect data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003); it also involves “a continuous process of building relationships” (p. 147). In this study there were a number of opportunities to build relationships with adult gatekeepers; namely, the school district, school principal, teachers, parents, and the focus of my interest, the children. In preparing to gain access and enter the field, Rossman and Rallis (2003) highlight the necessity “to develop a repertoire of strategies to gain access to sites” (p. 148). As a qualitative researcher I was mindful of their advice: “Draw on all of their interpersonal resources and skills as well as their theoretical understanding of social relationships and organizations” (p. 148). In this respect, I felt confident that I could draw on my interpersonal skills from my years of experience as a special education teacher, reading specialist, and literacy consultant.

In order to gain access to my population of interest, I contacted the school district superintendent to outline the purpose of my research study, and to ask permission to conduct my study in the district and in one particular school. I selected this school because I had some familiarity with the area from my previous role as an educator there and because, as a researcher, I felt this familiarity was beneficial because it gave me insights into the participant's lives in their community. The permission request was given in writing in a *School District Information Letter*, followed up with a phone call to the superintendent. After gaining approval from the superintendent to proceed with my study, I made contact with the school principal, in writing, in a *School Information Letter* to outline my study. After the initial contact, I made a phone call to make arrangements to meet the principal in person. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the study, to obtain approval to conduct my study in the school, and to gain access to teachers in the upper elementary grades who were willing to engage in a research study. With the principal's assistance, I contacted the two grade 6 teachers who shared a classroom, and they indicated their interest to participate. Similar to the access protocol I followed with the previous gatekeepers, I shared the purpose of my study in writing in a *Teacher Information Letter* and later met face to face with the two teachers to discuss specifics of the study and to answer their questions.

The recruitment process for participants began with a visit to the sixth-grade classroom, where I was introduced as a researcher who was interested in exploring students' perspectives on reading in their everyday lives. To be truly informed, Hill (2005) offered a set of "things" children should be told: 1) the aims of the research, 2) what time and commitment is required, 3) who will know the results, 4) whether there will be feedback, and 5) whether confidentiality is promised. Thus, during the information session I talked about myself as researcher; outlined the purpose of my study; addressed ethical concerns such as anonymity, confidentiality, and

participants' right to withdraw at any time; and highlighted the potential benefits of the research to the participants. I explained that the interview process involved asking questions about their reading practices. Once I addressed the students' questions, I distributed an information letter to all the students to take home to discuss with their parents. The *Parent Information Letter* outlined the specifics of the study together with the *Consent Form*. After I obtained the signed parental consents, I made contact with the potential participants and discussed the study in detail, and once again, addressed their questions and concerns and obtained their assent to participate in the study. The procedure to gain parental consent and the children's assent was followed in accordance with the University of Alberta Ethics Review.

Throughout the entire process to gain access to the students, there were a number of challenges. The first was the time frame for the students to return the *Parental Consent Forms*. The reason for the lengthy wait was because many of the students misplaced their letter, which resulted in having to re-distribute additional letters. The students also required numerous reminders to return the signed *Parental Consent Forms* to their teacher. Both of the teachers explained that this was normal behavior for students in this school.

Research Site

The study was conducted in the elementary school (K-8) where the five participants attend and in the home of each student. In selecting the home and school settings as research sites, I was mindful of the importance of establishing a private, comfortable, and safe environment for the participants to freely express their experiences about the topic of reading. In the home setting the interviews took place in the family kitchen. In the school setting the administration and office staff accommodated my requests for interview spaces and always ensured that I had a private location outside of the classroom to conduct my interviews. I

conducted literacy digs (Taylor, 2000) both in the school and home setting for the purpose of collecting artifacts of students' reading or samples of reading materials. In the school setting the literacy digs were conducted outside the classroom by examining their lockers, backpacks, and pockets. Literacy digs were not conducted in the classroom settings because the participants did not have permanent desks assigned.

Participant Selection

To explore students' perspectives on their reading in their everyday lives, I purposely selected sixth-grade students as the population of research interest. I selected this age group because this is a time when many students are said to have lost an interest in reading (Fasick et al., 2005; McKenna, Ellsworth, & Kear, 1995; PIRLS, 2006). The parents of the students and the students' two sixth-grade teachers were also included as participants, and they provided information about the context for the study. The study proceeded once participants were selected and after the necessary informed consents/assents were discussed, distributed, signed, and returned to me. The student participants in the study selected their own pseudonyms. Their profiles are highlighted in Chapter Four.

In the recruitment phase of conducting my research study, I was confronted by a number of challenges in the selection of participants. My initial plan was to select four participants. I chose four so that I could gain an in-depth understanding of reading experiences from multiple perspectives. However, what transpired during the recruitment phase was not what I had expected. Being new to the formal research process, I did not expect to have difficulty recruiting willing participants. On the contrary, I predicted my dilemma might be how to turn away potential participants.

The next day after two girls came forward with their consent to be part of the study, a week went by and no other students came forward with their willingness to participate. I remember being puzzled that out of a class of 29 potential participants, there were only two girls who were interested. I recall thinking at the time that perhaps this age group was not interested in sharing their perspectives on their everyday reading practices, especially with an outsider. Though this thought troubled me, as a qualitative researcher I was mindful that I had to be flexible and patient and to let the recruitment process unfold (Creswell, 2008), and as Ellis (1998b) articulated, I had to “appreciate the flow and unfolding quality of interpretive inquiry projects” (p. 16). I also paid attention to Morrow and Richards (1996), who explained, “Children are not used to being asked their opinions and to relate their experiences to unknown adults, and probably need to have some familiarity with the researcher” (p. 101). Turning to Merriam (1998), I was reminded that “qualitative research places the investigator in a largely uncharted ocean. For some it becomes an adventure full of promise for discovery; for others, it can be a disorientating and unproductive experience” (p. 21).

Heeding the advice of these scholars, I decided to re-visit the sixth-grade class to present a follow-up information session. The purpose of the visit was to establish a relationship with the students and to get another opportunity to de-mystify the research experience. After the follow-up visit, I was very pleased when one girl came forward, for a total of three girls. Thankfully, after several days lapsed, one boy plus one more girl came forward with their consent forms, for a total of five participants. Since only five students agreed to participate out of the entire class of 29 students, I decided to include all five students (four girls, one boy) in my study. Merriam (1998) explains that the characteristic nature of qualitative research allows for flexibility and a

tolerance for ambiguity, and this flexibility was evident in the events that played out in the recruitment process and the selection of my study participants.

Data Collection

As a qualitative researcher and an interpretive inquirer, I am aware that I am the primary instrument for data collection and that data are mediated through the researcher's insights "rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer" (Merriam, 1998, p.7). My data collection was approached from a hermeneutic stance in which I proceeded through the successive loops in the hermeneutic circle. This procedure consisted of a pre-interview activity, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, and literacy digs conducted both in the school and in the home. Each session of data collection was audio recorded and later transcribed. All artifacts were photographed and described in my field notes. In the proceeding sections, I detail the specific method and rationale for each of the data collection procedures.

Pre-Interview Activity

The data collection began with a pre-interview activity (Ellis, 2006) in which the study participants represented their experiences with reading through drawing (Kendrick & McKay, 2002). The pre-interview served to provide a direction and an entryway for the participants to start the conversation about the significance of the topic of reading from their perspectives (Ellis, 2006). I decided to include the pre-interview activity as a data collection method because in my previous experience I found it to be particularly useful as its primary function is to "support getting-to-know-you conversations" (Ellis, 2006, p. 118). The pre-interview activity helped give direction and structure to the interviews and led me to re-focus and re-frame my interview questions to be more suitable and meaningful to individual participants.

Prior to the pre-interview I met with the five participants as a group to discuss the pre-interview activity so that they would have time at home to complete their drawings and reflect on what they wished to share at the interview. This practice is in keeping with Ellis (2006), who stated that giving time for reflection was “a thoughtful way to proceed” (p. 120). At the group meeting the participants were offered a list of choices for pre-interview activities, which included the creation of a drawing, diagram, or list to highlight important aspects of their experience that they wished to share. Examples of three pre-interview activities (Appendix B) are 1) *Use a metaphor to complete this sentence: Reading is like...;* 2) *Draw a picture that represents a space or place where you enjoy reading. Use key words or a legend to describe what happens in that space or place or label parts of the place;* 3) *Make a schedule of your day or week to show how you spend your time outside of school. Use colors to code it and use a legend.*

The pre-interview activity was debriefed individually. I began the session for each participant with an invitation to talk about their drawing. The format was an open-ended interview in which I focused on asking the participants to describe their drawings rather than attempting to influence or interpret their responses by asking “why” (Ellis (2006). The purpose of the pre-interview activity was not to offer my interpretation of their drawing but to serve as a way to start the conversation and invite participants to share their stories (Ellis, 2006). Although pre-interview activities can “facilitate recollection and reflection” (Ellis, 2006, p. 113), interviewing prompts can “help the participant recall salient ideas and experiences” (p. 113).

Participant Interviews

One of the primary myths about using participant interviews in qualitative research is that it is an easy method of data collection (Weber, 1986) and that all an interpretive inquirer has to do is to ask the right questions and the children will talk (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). Although

not an easy method, the use of interviews in the hermeneutic inquiry approach has the potential to encourage genuine understanding and deep conversations about the phenomenon being studied (Weber, 1986). The purpose of interviewing in interpretive inquiry is to gain detailed insight into participants' views (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), from which inquirers and participants co-construct an account of their experiences (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). I was mindful not to jump to interpretation but to gather many different stories from multi-conversations and then to "mind the meaning" of stories and look for commonalities (Ellis, class notes, November, 2010).

What is particularly helpful in understanding the nature of interviewing as it applies to the conversations between myself and the student participants is Weber's (1986) notion of interviewing as the "*seeing the between*" (p. 68). As Weber reminds us, "It is through the seeing of that which is neither only *you* nor only *I* but is rather *our* between that we learn about each other" (p. 68). Conceptualizing interviewing as an invitation to have a conversation, or an opportunity for a shared experience and a mutual understanding, where both participant and researcher get caught up in the phenomenon (Weber, 1986), helped to illuminate the potential for using interviews. In my questioning, I was conscious of the need to listen on three levels: 1) "to concentrate on what the participant is saying to internalize and to understand the substance completely as often follow-up questions will flow; 2) to hear the inner or guarded voice saddled up against the outer, more public voice; and, 3) to be aware of the process and the substance" (Seidman, 1991, p. 51). To avoid interrupting the flow of my participants' accounts, I took the advice of both Seidman (1991) and Ellis's (class notes, November 20, 2010), who both suggest to jot down notes as the child raises important points that I wish to address later while striving to maintain an attentive and genuine interest in the participants' stories.

In order to explore the participants' experiences of reading, my data collection method included semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Weber, 1986). The questions posed explored the participants' experiences as young readers so that I could begin to understand who they are as readers, what is important to them in their everyday reading practices, and the nature of these practices. All interviews and conversations were digitally recorded and were transcribed immediately afterwards. This procedure served me well because it kept each participant's stories fresh in my memory and helped me to frame new questions for our next interview. I also kept a field journal, wherein I jotted my reflections and observations of the interviews and my thoughts and ideas as I listened to the audio recordings. During the process of transcribing, I developed follow-up questions based on the topics and experiences that participants shared and which I used to continue building on the conversations I had with each participant. The nature of the questions evolved through the circle and unfolding spiral of inquiry and were generated from comments made by the participants that needed clarification, dropped threads or questions that I missed, new directions I wished to take, or based on surprises Ellis (1998b) referred to as "uncoverings" in the data.

The interviews were conducted over a five-month period, and each interview session typically lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. The five participants were interviewed separately on seven occasions each. I visited each participant on six occasions in the school setting and once in his or her home. A final follow-up interview with the five participants separately took place in June and was conducted in the school setting. The participants' two teachers were interviewed for one hour-long session each. The parent interviews were conducted in their homes and each one was completed in one hour-long sitting.

To begin the interview process, I began with open-ended, “grand-tour” questions that Seidman (1991) suggested. Ellis (2010) explains that these kinds of questions are free flowing and likens them to “nets dipped into different parts of a pond to see what is there” (class notes, October 23, 2010). Such questions are like “ticklers” that help him or her think of things to talk about (Ellis, personal correspondence, December 11, 2010). I developed these open-ended questions as a means of encouraging my participants to open up about their thoughts and perspectives in order to get to know the participants as young people and to establish rapport. Three examples of questions used are:

- 1) If you had to go to school only 3 days a week, what are some things you’d like to do with your extra time?
- 2) In the year ahead what are some things you’d like to accomplish or try for the first time?
- 3) What is the best thing about being your age? What is the hardest thing about being your age? (Refer to Appendix B.)

Next, I followed up with open-ended questions that related specifically to their reading practices. For example:

- 1) What is the best thing about reading?
- 2) How have your experiences of reading changed over the last several years? How are they the same? How are they different?
- 3) Can you recall something that you read that was wonderful? (Refer to Appendix B.)

My prepared open-ended questions worked well as a frame of reference, but I adjusted them in response to the flow and course of the conversations. Participants’ responses were often used as a springboard for other questions. I also used pointed questions to check for accuracy of my

personal interpretations or understanding of children's responses, to raise topics of interest that did not rise naturally from children's responses, or to re-visit topics in case my participant wished to say more. Questions also arose spontaneously as part of the inquiry process of the hermeneutic circle while I was actively engaged in listening to the experiences the participants shared through their stories.

Teachers and parents were also included as participants in my study through informal interviews. Their involvement in the study was intended to provide information about the context of the community, school, and home. I met with the parents, all mothers, except in one home, where both parents were present during the informal interview. The parental interview questions included:

- 1) Can you describe your child's history as a reader?
- 2) Some people express concern that children these days don't read as much as they should. Have you ever thought this might apply to your child? Why or why not?
- 3) Can you describe your child's engagement with reading: avid reader, reluctant reader, average reader? Explain. (Refer to Appendix C.)

In my separate interviews with the language arts teacher and the homeroom teacher, I asked them to comment on the following question: *Do you consider the study participant to be avid reader? What makes you think that?* (Appendix D). The term "avid" reader in this study was used to mean "very eager." Additionally, I asked the teachers other questions in order to provide me with information for the context for the study. For example, I asked the homeroom teacher to provide me with a description of the demographics of the school community, which assisted me in situating the setting for the study. I asked the language arts teacher about reading practices in the school.

Literacy Digs

The data collection included conducting literacy digs (Taylor, 2000), which involved using my iPhone to take digital photographs of the participants' reading artifacts. Pahl and Rowsell (2012) define "artifact" as "an object that is tied to a context and has an identity. It carries a story and has a past" (p. xiv). Pahl and Rowsell (2010) point out that "artifacts bring in everyday life. They are material, and they represent culture." (p.2). I collected artifacts of the participants' reading from multiple sources in order to explore the complexities of their everyday reading practices. The artifacts consisted of samples of materials they read in school, which were located in the participants' lockers, backpacks, and pockets, and of materials they read in their homes. The artifacts the participants showed me in school and in their homes included both print-based text as well as digital texts on a variety of platforms, including electronic and digital devices such as the iPod touch, iPad, smart phone, e-reader, and home computer. During the process of taking digital photographs of their reading artifacts, I asked the participants to talk about the nature and meaning of each artifact. In the situation where a participant showed me a digital artifact – for example, their iPod touch – I asked him or her to demonstrate how the device was used, and I observed and asked questions about their practices. While they engaged in their activity, such as playing a favourite video game, I took photographs. I also took photographs of the home screen on their digital device in order to get a sense of the games and others apps they had downloaded. During the literacy dig I recorded our conversations, and these were later transcribed. These transcripts were very beneficial because they provided context for the digital photographs, which I reviewed and studied many times over the course of analyzing my data and writing my dissertation.

After the completion of the home literacy digs, as a token of thanks each participant was given a \$25.00 Chapter's bookstore gift card. I also gave each participant a small personalized gift during the follow-up interview at the completion of the study in June. These gifts were small in relation to what they gave to me. Patton (2002) writes "participants in research provide us with something of great value, their stories and their perspectives on their world. We show that we value what they give us by offering something in exchange" (p. 415).

Throughout the data collection process my genuine concern was not simply to find answers to my questions but, as Ellis (2006) put it, "to learn what the topic of the research is about for the participant" (p. 113) and to come to understand "the thinking and feeling behind people's actions" (p. 113). What I discovered in the data collection phase of my study is that it is neither easy nor simple. As a qualitative researcher, I found that "getting at something important" (Ellis, 2006, p. 114) takes time, as Ellis (1998b) pointed out, if one's interest is "to get closer to what one hopes to understand" (p. 20).

Data Analysis

The interweaving of data collection and analysis is highly transactional, each activity shedding new light on and enriching the other" (Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M., & Anzul, M., 1997, p. 165).

Data analysis began during the data collection phase, when I first began to think about my research questions and make decisions about the purpose of my study. Schwandt (2007) conceived of data analysis in qualitative inquiry as "recursive" (p. 7) and beginning at the onset of generating data. Mertens (1998) emphasizes the ongoing nature of analysis and points out, "It does not occur only at the end of the study" (p. 348). In their explanation of the analytical task, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) stress, "Some analysis must take place during data collection.

Without it, the data collection has no direction. . .” (p. 154). Merriam (2009) defines data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (p. 175-176). Ely et al., (1997) echo these sentiments and spell out, “Analytical and interpretive processes work in tandem in the construction of meaning” (p. 160).

Making sense of and interpreting data from a holistic approach throughout the study involved taking a hermeneutic stance to my data analysis. This played out using the metaphor of the circle and the forward and backward arc (Ellis 1998b). The forward arc (projection phase) involved getting an initial sense of my data while being cognizant of my fore-structure, or pre-understandings. Ellis (1998b) explained this was unavoidable and explained that “one uses one’s existing purposes, interests, and values – to interpret” (p. 26). The initial step was transcribing the data as soon as possible after each data collection session. I began by looking at my participants’ pre-activity drawings, reading the transcripts, then re-visiting the audio recordings to listen carefully and deeply while paying attention to what was said and not said, noting the pauses, the laughter, and the inflection in their voices, all in an effort to more deeply understand their stories. In the backward arc I was concerned with what may have gone unseen, missed, or absent in my initial interpretations. Thus, the data were re-examined and re-evaluated for contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies (Ellis, 1998b).

Through the constant flow of the forward and backward movement between the whole and the part and through new understandings, new questions emerged that informed my next inquiry and were then explored with my participants. Throughout the data collection phase, I continued to work recursively as I gathered from photographs, interviews, and conversations and

then read and re-read through the transcripts to interpret and analyze the data. Through this deliberative process of analyzing the micro and macro data, interpreting, re-examining, and in looking for deeper understandings and posing new questions, I attempted to get closer to what I wished to understand by focusing on my research questions and my participants' stories.

I accumulated an overwhelming amount of data throughout the process of data collection, which resulted in hundreds of pages of transcripts, a large volume of digital photographs of reading artifacts, and my personal journal notes. The challenge I faced after I left the field was how to make sense of all the data. I approached the monumental task by reading the literature in the field and investigating what other qualitative researchers have done, and I found this pursuit to be extremely constructive. The challenge, as Patton (2002) suggests, is to "do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study" (p. 433). To become intimate with the data I found it was helpful to re-visit the transcripts to read them from beginning to end. I returned many times to the audio recordings and listened to the participants' voices to capture their inflections, pauses, and their laughter in order to re-live the moment in time. I also found myself poring over the photos and carefully examining their reading artifacts. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue, "Having a scheme is crucial; the particular scheme you choose is not" (p. 175). Schwandt (2007) explains that in qualitative research "the inquirer employs a variety of analytic strategies that involved sorting, organizing, and reducing the data to something manageable and then exploring ways to reassemble the data in order to interpret them" (p. 7). To deal with the overwhelming amount of data, I developed a summary of key findings and found this extremely useful. Patton (2002) goes on to state that making sense of the data "involves reducing the volume of raw information,

sifting trivial from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (p. 432).

To begin my post-data-collection analyses, I placed my trust in the process and followed the basic steps outlined by Creswell (2003) to analyze qualitative data. The first step was to get a “sense of the whole” by reading all the transcripts carefully. Creswell (2003) suggested to choose one participant, read through his or her transcripts and ask: what is the participant talking about? During this process of reading and re-reading the transcripts, I made notes in the margins and highlighted and circled words, phrases, and sentences. I also wrote my thoughts, ideas, and questions in my journal and accumulated notes on each participant so that I could begin to craft his or her portrait. Early in the data analysis process, and in the midst of reading through the transcripts, several opportunities arose where I could share my preliminary findings. Though it seemed like a daunting task at the time, it served as the first round of getting a sense of my data and therefore was a worthwhile endeavor. In my effort to get a better sense of the whole, I compiled a summary of findings for each participant, which served as a snapshot of each participant’s rich descriptive stories. I combed through the data and added key phrases, identified direct quotes, and added dates and page numbers for future reference. It was during this undertaking in the analysis process in my effort to construct meaning that I made the decision to return to the field to collect additional data. This is not an unusual practice in qualitative interpretive inquiry, (Ellis, 1998b) and serves to fill gaps and ambiguities that arise during data analysis (Patton, 2002). I found it particularly helpful because it helped to clear up some of the questions I still had that needed to be clarified. So I revisited the school setting and interviewed each participant one last time.

After the final interviews, I returned to the task of immersing myself in more data, reading, re-reading and re-visiting the audio recordings. I embarked on the next step of analysis, which is to begin the process of reducing the volume of data. This process involved sifting through the transcripts and assigning a code, a word, or a phrase “that accurately described the meaning of the text” (Creswell, 2008, p. 251). I used colored Post-it notes for this task and assigned different colors to identify new topics as they emerged. For example, on one participant’s transcript I attached a yellow note and jotted down, “Sister lends books,” and on a white note to identify, “Likes diary genre.” To facilitate the location of important descriptive data in the transcripts, I noted the participant’s name, date, and page number on each Post-it note, and this process proved to be very advantageous later in the analysis process. The process of coding produced “piles of coded descriptions” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994 p. 184). Though fruitful, what resulted after the coding process was complete was a mass of colored sticky notes peeking out of each of the binders. I grouped similar codes together in an effort to collapse the codes into larger themes (Creswell, 2008). In this inductive stage of narrowing the data, my objective was to reduce the list of codes to five to seven categories, patterns, or themes.

Once coding was completed, I began to identify possible patterns and themes. Ellis (2006) outlined the three steps that helped me to identify the dominant themes arising from in the participants’ responses: 1) identify what is topical in the responses and cluster the responses according to the recurring topics; 2) re-examine the topic clusters and ask, “What are the stories about?”; and, 3) look across stories to “discern values, concerns, and predispositions that re-appear across clusters of stories” (p. 123). During this process I distanced myself from my themes in order to reflect upon and evaluate the themes from a more objective perspective. Ellis referred to this as poetic distance and how it “is needed for reflection and deep hearing and

sifting” (Ellis, personal correspondence, December 11, 2010). As I continued to develop the themes, I re-visited my research questions many times, and throughout the process of shaping and re-shaping, I continued to ask myself, “What are the stories about?” And my final themes emerged. Ellis’s (2006) three step process was invaluable because I was able to discern preoccupations, patterns, and recurring themes and provided me with a holistic picture from which to understand my participants’ stories of reading in their everyday lives.

When listening to children’s voices in matters that concern them, there is always the tension of which extracts to include and how much of the analysts’ interpretation to add (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). In the co-constructive process of meaning-making, I am mindful that the theoretical stance of the researcher and their orientation to the construction of meaning will fundamentally affect the way in which interview material is used in analysis” (p. 152).

Evaluating an Interpretive Account

In order to ascertain whether the interpretive account is accurate, complete, and reflective of participants’ voices, inquirers evaluate interpretive accounts. The evaluation stage is vital for interpretive inquirers because they are concerned with whether their inquiry answered the practical questions that directed their inquiry (Packer & Addison, 1989). Interpretive inquirers are not concerned with validating their findings as they are not speculations to be validated.

Whether the findings are true or false is not the question, but, rather, “how do you clarify the interpretive account to make it more comprehensive and comprehensible?” (p. 289).

Polkinghorne (1995) maintained that “the evaluation of the story has a pragmatic dimension in the sense that its value depends on its capacity to provide the reader with insight and understanding” (p. 20). In evaluating an interpretive account, Ellis (1998b) suggested that inquirers ask “whether the concern which motivated the inquiry has been advanced” (p. 30). She

proposed that when evaluating an interpretive account, inquirers consider six questions that can satisfy whether an answer has been uncovered in the interpretive inquiry:

- 1) Is it plausible, convincing?
- 2) Does it fit with other material we know?
- 3) Does it have the power to change practice?
- 4) Has the researcher's understanding been transformed?
- 5) Has a solution been uncovered?
- 6) Have new possibilities been opened up for the researcher, research participants, and the structure of the context? (p. 30).

In my evaluation of my interpretive accounts, I used the six questions set forth by Ellis (1998b). First, in order to ensure my account was both plausible and convincing, I checked for accuracy with my five participants when I brought the transcripts from previous interviews and we examined the accuracy and completeness of the transcripts. This activity allowed me to ask the participants for any clarification that I needed, and for the participants it provided an opportunity for them to add, change or delete information. Once this process was completed, I was assured that the transcripts reflected what the participants wished to convey. Later, to member-check the accuracy of the parental and teacher interview transcripts, I returned the transcripts to the parents and the teachers to read for accuracy. All participants verified that the transcriptions accurately reflected their words and sentiments. Any discrepancies found were corrected. In order to ensure my account fit with other research material, I read literature on the topic and noted similarities and discrepancies as it related to my research questions. Throughout the evaluative process, I was confident that what was uncovered in the interpretive accounts has the power to change practice. And to this end, the interpretive inquiry answered the practical and

concerning questions that directed my inquiry, and it has opened up possibilities for future research into young readers' everyday reading practices.

Thus, once I addressed the six question, I was satisfied of the credibility of my interpretive account, and I am convinced that my interpretive account is “persuasive, trustworthy and authentic” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114) and that the concern that motivated my inquiry has been advanced (Ellis, 1998a; Packer & Addison, 1989).

Ethical Considerations

Permission for my study was granted by the faculties of Education and Extension, Augustana and Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board Research. This study was conducted in accordance with the *University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants*, (University of Alberta General Faculties Council, 2011) and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* for ethical research (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada).

After my ethics application was approved, I obtained permission to perform research from the school district and provided the district with copies of all the necessary information letters and consent forms for teachers and parents and the assent letter for student participants. The information letter outlined the nature and purpose of the study in detail, which included parameters for involvement, procedures, and assurances of the safeguards put in place to ensure and protect privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, as well as data security. I also ensured that participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. The information letter and consent/assent forms provided the participants

with the opportunity for voluntary and informed consent/assent, and their signature indicated their agreement to participate in the study.

Ethical considerations must be followed through at every stage and not just at the beginning to be swept away and forgotten (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Although ethical considerations must be adhered to with all participants, children as participants bring about a host of other ethical considerations. The special ethical considerations for using child participants are outlined in the next section.

Despite the wealth of research on childhood study, there exists today little in the way of publications on *ethical consideration* and research methods (Hill, 2005). In the wake of the work by James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) on theorizing childhood and legislation (Children Act 1989; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), “that emphasizes the importance of enabling children to express their opinions on important matters and decisions affecting themselves” (p. 62), a host of critical questions and considerations must be addressed. Emphasizing the importance of enabling children to express their views in matters that affect their lives comes with the need to examine ethical dilemmas and provide guidelines for conducting research with children. When conducting research with children, Ellis and Oberg (2006) point out that “children require considerable sensitivity” (p. 107) and suggest that it is necessary “to proceed in ways that respect their competence while acknowledging their different life experiences, knowledge, and prior experiences of interacting with adults.” (p. 107).

Study Limitations

Creswell (2008) uses limitations to address potential weaknesses of the study identified by the researcher. The findings in this study were limited to the specific time period, circumstances, location, and the experiences of the five sixth-grade students interviewed and

their willingness to share these experiences with me and their ability to articulate these experiences, in addition to information provided by their two teachers and the parents. Creswell (2008) also uses limitation “to help readers judge to what extent the findings can or cannot be generalized to other people or situations” (p. 207). This implies that the findings from this small sample population cannot be applied to other sixth-grade students in other schools and in other classrooms. Every study has limitations that may be influenced and shaped by factors such as the researcher’s own ontological and epistemological beliefs, data collection method, and analysis and interpretation of the data, and therefore the emphasis will be on my understanding of the five sixth-grade students’ perspectives on reading in their everyday lives.

Study Delimitations

As a qualitative interpretive inquiry, this study is delimited to the perspectives of the five sixth-grade students, four girls and one boy. The homeroom teacher, the language arts teacher, and the parents of the five participants were included to provide information about the context for the study. The five participants in the study attended the same school in the same classroom and lived in the same school community; two participants lived in the rural area and three in the town. The participants were from varied socio-economic backgrounds in a predominately Euro-Canadian rural community, located in western Canada.

My study is grounded in my personal ontological and epistemological stance towards the nature of knowledge and how we acquire it. My stance aligns with the basic tenets of the social constructivist paradigm. My goal was to write a coherent and defensible interpretive narrative account that sheds light on my research question and provides ideas for helpful action. To this end, I designed a research study that permitted me to examine, from multiple perspectives, the perspectives of early adolescent students on their reading and how they use reading in their

everyday lives. This design also allowed me to form a detailed representation and analysis of their practice and perspectives. The results of my inquiry are described and discussed in Chapter Four through descriptive and thematic development. The findings are discussed and implications are drawn in Chapter Five. Ultimately, it is hoped that new understandings derived from this study will provide insights that can help to inform theory and practice in the area of reading instruction in a culture infused with rapidly changing literacies.

CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY FINDINGS

The purpose of my research study is to explore early adolescent students' perspectives on their reading. The aim of the study is to learn how young people use reading in their everyday lives. Although each story of reading is personal and unique to the individual participant, several common themes were identified. This chapter summarizes my findings and central insights, which I have organized around three themes that emerge from the data. The three key themes central to my study are: 1) Everyday reading is meaningful; 2) Reading has personal and private dimensions; 3) Readers face constraints. This chapter begins with a description of the context for the study, followed by a descriptive portrait of the five participants, which includes insights from the perspective of their parents and teachers. The next part of the chapter presents the three central themes as they relate to the purpose of my study.

Context for the Study

The five participants in the study attend a kindergarten to grade 8 elementary school with a student population of 300, located in a small western Canadian town several hours from a major city. The school draws its student population from the town of approximately 7,000 residents and from an additional population of 4,000 residents in the outlying rural areas. The major industries in the area are related to the oil industry or agriculture, and most residents are of Caucasian descent. The socio-economic level in the community falls on a continuum and consists of wealthy, influential families; working middle-class families; and families who are in financial need. The participants in my study fell within this range.

The second- and third-generation town is very friendly, welcoming, and volunteer oriented. The generous climate of the town lends itself to many fundraising ventures, which contribute huge amounts of money to community groups and services, both local and global.

Being a rural community, outdoor pursuits – such as hunting, skating, sledding, cross country and downhill skiing, and camping – provide the community’s residents with many opportunities for leisure activities. Other popular pursuits include golfing on the 18-hole golf course just outside the town, curling in the winter months as well as a very vibrant Junior A hockey league. For the youth of the community there is hockey, ringette, baseball, soccer, a swim club, dance, martial arts, a recreational center, and a skateboard park to keep them involved in physical activity, enjoyment, and skill development. Every year the community hosts a music festival that features local young musicians and singers and is a popular and well-attended event. As far as shopping, the community has several strip malls and a number of big box stores that are usually found in small communities, which are in addition to a number of franchise and locally owned stores. There is also a Thrift Store where at least one participant stated they shopped. The town does not have a bookstore, but it does have a library; however, it is not being utilized by the five participants. Not unlike other small towns, the town has fast-food outlets, popular restaurants chains as well as family-owned specialty restaurants.

A typical school day for the five study participants starts with Mrs. Jones in their sixth-grade homeroom classroom. Mrs. Jones teaches math, social studies, and science every weekday morning. After lunch, students are expected to read self-selected material during the ten-minute silent reading time. In the afternoon, Mrs. Snow teaches language arts, which takes place during the last block of the day, from 2:20 p.m. until the school day ends at 3:17 p.m. She indicated that, with the transition between classes, the 45- minute classes make it difficult to fit everything in, but she said, “We are making do with what we have. They [the students] know that they need to come in and get focused.”

The language arts program consists of reading groups for most of the year, and they are formed based on students' reading level from a standardized reading test. During the language arts period, students in each group are assigned the book they read by their teacher. Mrs. Snow mentioned that students will have the opportunity to choose their own books later in the school year, "probably in the springtime, sometime." Mrs. Snow also noted that the students are expected to read aloud in their groups. During the language arts program, on Wednesday afternoon, the participants visit the library for their weekly scheduled book exchange. Because the school library clerk is employed on a part-time basis (mornings only, for three days a week), the participants do not have any contact with her during their book exchange. This school, not unlike many other schools, does not employ a teacher-librarian, but instead has a library clerk who is responsible for managing all aspects of the library. When the library clerk is not in the library, the educational assistance hired for the classroom performs the book exchanges. Mrs. Snow indicated that students are given about five to ten minutes to search for books and to check or renew their selections for the week. Mrs. Snow's requirement is that they choose a novel at their reading level, and then, as she noted, "they can grab their information book...they are really into *Ripley's Believe It Or Not*, all the picture type." Based on her observations, graphic novels are very popular, especially, as she said, "with our not so avid readers." Unlike in previous years, the school does not presently have a school-wide reading program. The school does, however, have a silent reading program, which takes place every day after lunch, where students are required to bring their own reading material and read independently for ten minutes.

In this school, technological devices (smartphone, iPods, iPads, etc.) are banned in the classroom and are confiscated if they are visible during instructional time. However, devices are permitted during school breaks for students in the middle grades (grades 6 to 8). Students also

have access to the two computer rooms during breaks in the school day. In relation to technology use in the classroom, the participants have access to the computer room in their language arts program and use the computers mainly for purposes of story writing. All teachers in this school have iPad tablets for their personal use in their classrooms.

Both Mrs. Snow and Mrs. Jones subscribe to a traditional view of reading and of reading texts, which they articulated during our interviews when they offered their perspective on reading. Mrs. Jones offered her view on what constitutes text: “I just find that as time goes on, in my experience as a teacher, print is unfortunately not as valued anymore. We are competing with video games and we are competing with computers.” When Mrs. Jones talked about the participants in relation to them as readers, she expressed the following sentiment: “What they do at home during their spare time, it’s not pick up a book and read.” In our exchange on this topic, Mrs. Jones pointed out that although some of the participants talked to her about the video games they played, none of them talked about their reading interests outside of school. Mrs. Snow also noted, “A lot of the other discussions [teacher/student discussions] going on aren’t about language necessarily, it’s not the reading.” In relation to how she determined whether the participants were avid readers, Mrs. Snow said, “Vocabulary and comprehension are probably the two biggest indicators for me, as to whether they are or [are] not reading.” Both Mrs. Snow and Mrs. Jones indicated they had few opportunities to have conversations with their students about their reading. Mrs. Snow articulated this when she said, “If I taught them a little bit more, maybe I could speak more on their reading outside of school, just because I would know them a little bit better, but I only know the discussions that are going on in one class.”

Introducing the Participants

Being an educator with years of experience and having taught and worked with this age group, I expected the five study participants to be unique individuals with different dispositions, interests, and life histories, and to have varied reading experiences and reading practices. Though the participants in the study shared certain commonalities, my expectations were borne out, and I found each of them to be unique individuals in the way James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) described – that is, as “[people] in their own right with status and a course of action, a set of needs – in sum as a social actor[s]” (p. 207) with agency, who can provide their own perspective on matters that affect their daily lives.

The five young people in my study are born digital; meaning that they have not known of a world, or of a life, without technology. All of them have access to a computer in their home, while most, but not all, come from families that have the means to afford them with the latest mobile digital devices (e.g., iPod touch, tablets, smartphones, e-readers). In relation to traditional print-based text, all of the participants come from homes where they have access to a variety of print and where reading is encouraged, a priority, and valued.

The following section introduces each participant and offers some insights into (a) my relationship with the participants, (b) their family backgrounds, and (c) relevant personal information about their everyday lives. It also provides a summary of each participant’s history as a reader from the perspective of their parent(s) and their homeroom and language arts teachers. This section also offers an overview of how each participant views him or herself as a reader, which will be explored fully in the three themes later in this chapter. What follows are the portraits of the five study participants: Amelia, Reece, Juliet, Katrina, and Ben.

Amelia

Amelia is a friendly, articulate 11-year-old girl with a bubbly personality and a beautiful smile. At our first meeting she expressed that she was excited to be part of my university study. She was very comfortable with the interview process and was eager to share her stories about her life and her reading experiences. I was quite taken by Amelia's positive energy and her animated disposition. Quite often she was so excited to tell me something about hockey or her reading that she just bubbled over, spilling out her words with such passion and enthusiasm that I was immediately drawn into her world.

Amelia is the middle child in a family of five and lives with her mother, father, and two brothers. Her home is on an acreage setting a short distance from town. Her mother is a homemaker and her father works in the oil and gas industry. Amelia leads a very busy life. She is a natural athlete and is very competitive. Besides being in the swim club, playing baseball, soccer, and school volleyball, she dances, figure skates, and plays hockey on a boys' hockey team.

Amelia is described by her mother as a high achiever who thrives on competition, especially with her older brother. She is also a "go-getter," and in her mother's words, "it's always, game on." Her interest in school work is also based on a deep curiosity and sense of playfulness. When asked whether she had done anything differently than other 11-year-old girls, Amelia said, "Not that different, but I have been to some places cause we travel every few years. It's important to me because I know that I learned something from my travels." At home she likes to read her books and play games on the computer. Amelia also has access to an iPad that her family recently purchased and was excited to learn to use this digital device. When asked the question, "What makes you happy?" Amelia responded, "When I have my friends around,

there's a good book, or if we won a hockey game." When she was asked about her leisure time activities Amelia said, "Like, if I have free time, I will relax, play games, and read." When asked whether she had any digital devices, Amelia emphatically replied, "Yes, an iPod touch, it's mine!"

Amelia's mother described Amelia as a "pretty easy-going girl." In our conversations, she told me that Amelia has always loved to read, and as a child she would often read and make up stories for her younger brother. She said that reading has always been easy for Amelia and that recently she has noticed Amelia challenging herself more as a reader. Amelia's mother described her daughter as being "absolutely an avid reader," who usually has a book in her hand.

One, but not both, teachers agreed with the mother's perception of Amelia's reading habits. Amelia's homeroom teacher, Mrs. Jones, characterized Amelia as not being an avid reader. She said that although "she is at the top of the class as far as ability goes, Amelia has never brought a book to class." By contrast, Mrs. Snow, the language arts teacher, described Amelia as an avid reader. Mrs. Snow said that she had several reasons for saying that Amelia was an avid reader. First, she based her perception on discussions she has had with Amelia's parents. Secondly, according to Mrs. Snow, Amelia enjoys reading, "because she would prefer that as opposed to doing several other things we are doing in class." Based on the teacher's classroom observations, "Amelia is also the last one to complain about it when I ask them to do reading."

Amelia identified as a strong reader. She said, "I like reading a lot." Interestingly, when Amelia talked about herself as a reader, she described herself as a "not 100% reader really." Amelia explained that her organized recreational activities took up so much of her time, and because of this, she could not give a hundred percent of her time to reading. Amelia was fairly

confident she had always been a good reader and had never had any difficulty reading in school. She pointed out that she was in the top reading group in her class. According to Amelia, she was placed in the high-level reading group based on “how good you read and how good you understand, like, what you are reading.” Amelia also believed she was a good reader because she was selected to represent her school in a division-wide reading competition called Battle of the Books and only the students who were good readers were selected for the team.

Reece

Reece is an energetic, clever, and confident 11-year-old girl. In our interviews she was refreshingly candid and straightforward about her life and about her experiences with reading. When I first met Reece, she told me she was excited to be in my study and said that both she and Amelia, who is her best friend, decided they wanted to be in it together. Reece is a very articulate young girl, and she was able to express herself in a thoughtful and insightful way.

Reece is the youngest child in a family of five and lives with her mother, father, and two older sisters. Her mother is a homemaker, and her father’s work is in the oil and gas industry. Reece lives on an acreage close to town and enjoys many of the outdoor activities that acreage living affords. She said that she loves to play outdoors and especially likes to ride her horse in the summer and snowboard in the winter. On weekends Reece enjoys hanging around in her pajamas and watching television, hanging out with friends, reading, or playing on her computer and her iPod touch digital device. In her free time, Reece said, she likes to use her imagination and play “store” with her sister and her friends. When she was asked what made her happy, Reece noted, “when I’m with my friends or reading a book.” Her top three leisure time activities are sports, playing outside, and reading.

In my conversation with Reece's mother, she told me that Reece learned to read at a young age because of the influence of her oldest sister. She described Reece's early years in this way: "She liked reading. She liked being read to. She liked writing stories, telling stories, all of it." She said that Reece is a good reader and believes she is one of the top readers in her class. But recently she has noticed that Reece does not read as much. She said, "Picking up a book for entertainment would not be her first choice." Though she wished Reece would read more, she said, "I know that she knows how to read, so I'm not worried about it you know." She also related her personal belief about technology and said, "I think that electronics have, you know, taken over." With regard to reading habits, she described Reece as not an avid reader and not reluctant either, but somewhere in between.

Mrs. Jones, her homeroom teacher, characterized Reece as not being an avid reader. She said that Reece does not struggle with reading or comprehension, but she has never seen her with a book, because Mrs. Jones usually sees Reece drawing in her free time. Mrs. Snow, the language arts teacher, shared the sentiment that Reece was not an avid reader. She stated, "I know that she definitely does read, but she has a specific genre of book that she really enjoys and anything outside of that, I can't see her reading." In relation to reading outside of school, Mrs. Snow added, "Her hobbies at home don't seem to be reading to the extent of the other ones either."

Reece identified herself as a strong reader. According to her, "I'm probably one of the top five in the class." She told me that she liked to read. She also made it clear, "I like reading depending on the book." When asked whether she thought her teacher considered her to be a good reader, she reasoned that she did since her teacher often asked her to read aloud in class. "Like in class she asks people to read like out of the textbook or the handout and she asks like

the people who always put up their hands to read and stuff.” When Reece talked about her early years, she said, “I was always a good reader.” Reece revealed how her confidence as a reader was fueled early on and shaped by a significant reading event that involved her teacher and a favourite picture book by Eric Carle. She recalled the event like this:

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, it’s one of my favorite books when I was little cause when I was in kindergarten we did a play of that and I got picked to read by the teacher cause I was one of the best readers.

She added, “I think it was special to me because she chose me as one of the stronger readers in the class and we were only in kindergarten.” It was evident in the way Reece related the story to me that this event left a lasting impression of herself as a competent and skilled reader.

Juliet

Juliet is a very serious, reserved 11-year-old girl who speaks in a soft, monotone voice. When I first met Juliet, my initial impression was of a lovely girl who was timid and distant. From the start Juliet appeared nervous in our interviews, and she had difficulty expressing her thoughts in an articulate manner. Consequently, I often re-framed my questions to give Juliet another opportunity to communicate her experiences. To ensure that she was comfortable with the interview process, I was mindful that I communicated to her that I valued and cared about her thoughts and opinions and that I was interested in what she had to say about her reading. Over time, Juliet became more at ease with the interview process, and although she did not volunteer information unless she was asked directly, what she shared was concise and extremely enlightening. When I re-visited our conversations, I realized that I had learned a great deal from Juliet about her reading, and I was very pleased that she had consented to be in my study.

Juliet comes from a single-parent family of five and lives with her mother, one older sister, and two younger siblings. She lives in town within walking distance of the school. Being an older sibling, Juliet spends a great deal of her time caring for her younger siblings and helping with the household duties. She described that a typical weekend involved screen time on the family's home computer, playing with her younger siblings, and reading. Juliet did not mention being involved in any organized recreational activities. When Juliet was asked whether she used any digital devices, she said she did not but hoped to get an iPod touch from her grandmother for Christmas. When I visited her home in January for the literacy dig, Juliet told me that she did not get an iPod touch for Christmas. She instead got an iPod Nano, a digital device for music. When I asked her to show it to me, she said she could not find it. Juliet was the only participant who did not own an iPod touch.

In my conversation with Juliet's mother, she conveyed that reading is a priority in the home and that books are important. She said, "It's important to me that my children learn to speak well and you do that reading a book." Though Juliet picked up books when she was young and often mimicked her older sister, her mother mentioned that reading was difficult for Juliet in the early years. "She had some trouble getting going," her mother noted, "and she had difficulty reading in kindergarten." She said this all changed, "once she started to pick up the letters and she was able to understand them then she got back her excitement about it." She described Juliet as being an avid reader. She noted, "She is kind of like me, we go through lulls. We read tons and tons of stuff and then we kind of like drop the ball for a while and walk away from it." She added, "But she is always a consistent reader, she doesn't ever stop reading. She just goes through periods where she doesn't read as much."

In contrast, Mrs. Jones, the homeroom teacher, characterized Juliet as not being an avid reader. She based this on her observation that she had never seen Juliet bring a book to class. She said that “she is into her drawing and crafts, very creative” but that “print definitely to me is not something that is a priority for her.” Mrs. Snow, the language arts teacher, remarked that she was not sure about Juliet’s out-of-school reading habits. “She is kind of a mystery for me because in class she will read, but she is very shy and she doesn’t really talk about anything at home.”

Juliet’s description of herself as a reader conflicted with those of both of her teachers. Juliet said that she does read. Although she enjoys reading, she said that there were certain times when she did not read as much because other things occupied her time, which is why she explained that as a reader she was “kind of in the middle.” Juliet recalled that reading did not come easy for her in the younger grades. She reasoned this was because “I just didn’t know so many words.” When she was asked whether she thought her teachers considered her a reader, she replied, “I’m not sure. Well maybe a little cause I put my hand up in class to read out of the textbook.”

Katrina

Katrina is a creative 10-year-old girl with a friendly, pleasant personality. Though she is quiet and soft-spoken, she did not hesitate to engage in conversation and often initiated the exchange while we walked to the interview room. Our talk usually revolved around her dance classes, dance camp, or an upcoming dance competition. Katrina was passionate about her dance and extremely proud when she told me that she was the only one in her dance studio who could do the full-out flat-left-right split, which is a difficult dance technique to execute. She was very comfortable talking to me about this aspect of her life and anything to do with crafts, her digital devices, or her love of the boy band, Big Time Rush. In contrast, when the talk turned to her

reading experiences, Katrina was more serious, and she did not speak with the same excitement or confidence in her voice.

Katrina is the younger sibling in a family of four and lives with her mother, stepfather, and an older brother. She is also part of an extended family with two stepbrothers, who visit every other weekend. Katrina lives in town within walking distance of the school. Katrina leads a busy life outside of school, based on the schedule she drew of a typical week. She goes to the dance studio every day of the week to take lessons in jazz, ballet, solo, and tap. She told me that the dance studio is her favorite place to be. On the weekend, Katrina usually watches TV, cleans her room, listens to music, and makes crafts. When her girlfriends come over, she said, they usually play video games, board games, or play an imaginary game she called *school of arts* where they role play school and have different subjects like dance, acting, and singing. Katrina stated that she often plays on her Nintendo Wii, her computer, or her iPad and iPod touch digital devices. She was the only participant to have a smartphone. Katrina pointed out that reading was not one of her top three favorite leisure time activities.

In an interview, Katrina's mother told me that it has been a challenge to get her daughter to read. She recollected how Katrina did not pick up reading easily, and she said, "I did have to work with her quite a bit." She indicated that Katrina would rather do crafts and "artsy stuff," and said, "I would like to see her reading more but I also believe that if you force them too hard it's not going to work either." In her mother's view, Katrina is a reluctant reader although, at the same time, she conveyed that, "if she is interested in it, she will read it from front to back if she wants to."

Mrs. Jones, the homeroom teacher, characterized Katrina as not being an avid reader. She described Katrina as an avid dancer and a very creative person who loved to draw. "But honest to

goodness I have never seen her voluntarily pick up a book.” Mrs. Snow, the language arts teacher, shared the same opinion. When she compared Katrina to the other study participants, she said, “I probably say the least likely of the five participants to be considered an avid reader.” She commented that “Katrina has hobbies outside of the school world that seem to take over.”

Katrina, likewise, described herself as not being an avid reader. She told me, “I’d like to read more, but reading isn’t my favorite, I don’t usually read.” Of all the participants, Katrina was also the only one who self-identified as being a weak reader. Though she said that her reading had improved, she described her reading as being “not really good.”

Ben

Ben is a friendly, gentle, and soft-spoken 10-year-old boy who is not very talkative. During our interview Ben often appeared lethargic, laying his head on his arm and saying that he was tired because he did not have enough sleep. Though Ben did not volunteer information, he did answer questions. His initial responses were often, “I don’t know really,” followed by, “I never really thought about that.” I found I had to return to specific conversations with follow-up questions in order to give Ben the opportunity to tell me more about a detail or to clarify something he had said. Though Ben’s responses tended to be brief, the stories he shared over the course of many interviews were revealing and informative.

Ben is the middle child in a family of five and lives with his younger sister, older brother, and his mother and father. Ben lives in town and walks a short distance to his school. Prior to enrolling in formal schooling in the third grade, he was home-schooled by his mother along with his older brother. Ben told me he enjoys playing basketball and badminton and is on the school volleyball team. He has also recently taken up guitar. Ben told me that sports, homework, and

guitar ranked high on his favorite leisure time activities while reading was ranked, “probably fifth or sixth on the list.”

He described a typical weekend as consisting of visits with friends, playing outside, and his various screen-based activities. The screen activities included watching movies, playing on a friend’s Sony PlayStation, and accessing the home computer. Ben indicated that he does not watch television, but he does have Netflix. When asked whether he had an iPod touch digital device, Ben was very proud that he had saved and paid for his own iPod touch and said, “I got it when it was sort of brand new.”

In our conversations, Ben’s mother recalled that “Ben read very early. He learned the sounds very early from hearing us instruct our older child. He picked it all up, and it was just very simple for him.” She said, “He sort of read by osmosis; we didn’t put a lot of work into reading.” According to her, “He enjoys literacy, and I think for the most part, he sees the use and understands that it is important.” She said, “He turns to print for a lot of things.” She described Ben as a skilled reader, who reads above his grade level but is not an avid reader “in the sense that reading is not a desired leisure time activity.” Ben’s father agreed with this description and added that Ben was somewhere in between a reluctant and avid reader. He also described his son as “a gamer.” In relation to this he said, “He’s got the devices right, so they get – we understand that they get a lot of their interaction and reading skills, some of it, from social media.” As a reader, Ben’s father said, “Ben is coming to that age where he needs to find the genre that best suits him.”

Mrs. Jones, the homeroom teacher, also characterized Ben as not being an avid reader. She commented that “he has never brought a book into the class” and that “he is one of those kids that – when he’s done, he wants to visit his buddy halfway across the classroom.” Mrs.

Snow, the language arts teacher, shared Mrs. Jones' characterization of Ben as a non-avid reader. She pointed out that her conversations with Ben mainly revolved "around his television shows, video games, and the technology side of our world, and not so much paper-pen reading and that kind of thing." In class, she has observed that Ben "is not as willing to complete his silent reading or to read in a group as he is a bit shy when it comes to sharing."

Ben described himself as a "kind of in the middle" reader. He said, "I don't love to read, but I don't hate to read either." Though Ben self-identified as a good reader, he said he wanted to be a better reader. He felt he still was not a strong reader because he was not good at oral reading. Ben said that oral reading was a common practice in the reading groups in his language arts class. He said that he knew he was a good reader because he was in the highest reading group in the class and "basically we have the biggest book." He assessed his reading in this way: "Like compared to some kids in my class I am a pretty good reader." According to Ben, his language arts teacher placed him in this group because he achieved a high score on a reading test. "We have this little reading thing for language. We had to do one of those Gates tests. I think I got an E, and I think the three other people who got Es are in my group." When he talked about his early years of being home-schooled, Ben indicated that he basically taught himself to read. He recalled his version of events: "I saw my mom read to my brother and then I would sort of get it."

Although three themes were identified that highlight reading in new times for the reader in terms of their purposeful functions of language, in reality there is an overlap. The nature of reading is purposeful and texts can be meaningful in many ways or for many purposes which sometimes overlap or are not easily defined. Thus, the themes identified are not discrete and

static, but are instead dynamic, interactive, and constantly changing and shifting depending on the various texts and how they served to provide what the reader needs.

Theme One: Everyday Reading is Meaningful

What do the participants define as reading? When the participants in my study talked about their reading, they initially defined reading as just books, magazines, and comics. At the beginning of the study, they all assumed a more traditional definition of reading as reading paper-based texts. They did not mention other forms of text (digital or multimodal) as reading. It was only through the inquiry research process after many conversations and questions about their varied reading practices, and during the literacy digs when we talked about their digital devices and how they used them, that their ideas about text changed and they started to see others kinds of text as reading.

As far as technology and the impact it has made on their reading in their everyday lives, what was most enlightening were the participants' perspectives in relation to what constitutes reading. Only Reece made reference to digital text as being a legitimate form of reading, and this was only in relation to a conversation I had with her on the topic of where she liked to read in her house. "Well like I am on the computer; that is also reading because I have to read stuff to play games and like go on Facebook and stuff." She, however, stated that it was a different kind of reading, as her comment highlighted: "But you don't really think of it like how it would be if you were reading a book." When the other participants talked about their reading, initially, they did not view their varied uses of digital and electronic platforms and different text forms as reading, but instead, in the way Amelia articulated, as mainly "playing with technology."

However, when the five participants were asked about their uses of their digital and electronic devices, numerous stories of reading were revealed. It was only when the participants

talked about their varied digital practices and showed me how they used them that the participants started to see other kinds of text as reading. When the discussion turned to Amelia's various uses of, for example, the Internet, YouTube, and Google, her comments revealed that she had not viewed her online computer and gaming practices as legitimate text forms. "Like there are words that you can read, but it's more like using the controls or something." After we exchanged some discussion on the topic, Amelia recognized that reading was involved in her various electronic and digital practices. "'Cause there is reading in there, you have to read it and then you can play, so it's kind of like in the middle: there is reading and it's also like a game.'" As Amelia started to reflect on her digital practice, her perceptions of what constitutes reading started to change in that she started to see other kinds of text as reading: "Ya, you don't even think you are reading, but you are." Initially, when Juliet talked about her digital and online practices, she considered what she was doing as playing with technology. In subsequent interviews, however, Juliet changed her mind when she realized, through the interview process, that her digital practices involved reading as well as playing, which is when she considered that it was "kind of both." This occurred when I asked her to tell me about some of her favourite digital activities and what she liked about them. Katrina described her digital and electronic text practices not as a form of reading but, as Juliet and the others first noted, "playing with technology." Similar to the other participants, Katrina also started to see other kinds of text as reading when she recognized that reading was involved when she played a popular video game: "Most of it is doing other things, but some is also reading."

However, for Katrina and the other participants, this change of view of reading was not a spontaneous process. It was only after I specifically asked the participants if they had ever thought of their many digital activities as reading that they eventually realized and articulated

something to the effect of, “Come to think of it, it probably is.” Ben made a distinction between his online practices where reading was involved: “Facebook, yes, but not really YouTube or Google.” Though he was cognizant that he would be required to read when he went on the Google website, Ben made his view transparent when he said, “I don’t really think about that.” I recall at the time asking myself, “Why not?” Although Ben and the other participants began to see that their various digital and online practices involved some reading, it was not until much later in the research process that they started to view these text sources as being legitimate forms of text.

Interestingly, when Reece was asked specifically about her various digital and electronic online activities she described them as being just part of everyday life. As far as she was concerned:

It’s just like playing and looking at games and stuff. ‘Cause some of my games on my iPod, you have to read what it says to play the game and stuff and like on the Wii you have to read what it says, but you really don’t think of it as reading, you just think of it as playing the game. And when I’m texting, I just think of talking to my friends.

Reece’s comments suggest that she was more focused on the activity and not only the reading or the technology. However what became evident in our discussions on the topic is that the participants just never thought about it that much, as Ben implied, because it was just a natural process for them, as Reece articulated so powerfully:

Kids my age are, like, on the Internet quite a bit, so I think they are used to having all that, like just the reading, so it doesn’t seem like reading to them. So we are just used to it I guess.

Reece raised an important point when she shared her perspective in relation to these practices being just everyday, normal text practices in which young people are engaged today.

When the five participants in this study described their experiences of reading they talked about reading as being meaningful and part of their daily lives. Initially, when asked why they read, they responded much like Juliet, who articulated, “To get a laugh.” “It’s entertaining.” “It’s relaxing.” “Cause it’s fun.” Although the participants certainly experienced reading in this way, it soon became apparent during the process of inquiry that the nature of their reading experiences was much deeper. In sharing their stories, they demonstrated a multitude of ways their reading fulfilled certain functions in their lives and brought them tremendous benefits. The purposeful nature of reading was apparent whether they were talking about either traditional-based print or digital text, and it included their gaming pursuits on their various digital and electronic devices.

As far as Amelia was concerned, “reading is everywhere,” and just part of your life. In this sense, reading was meaningful, and it fulfilled functions in the participants’ lives. For the participants, reading their various texts, both digital and traditional static media afforded opportunities to use reading in many different ways and for multiple, distinctive purposes. Sometimes it afforded them opportunities to explore their identity or to learn new information; for others, to follow various intellectual pursuits or to be social. It was clear that for each participant, texts were used for one (or all) of these purposes, and the participants made clear distinctions between them. Precisely as Reece’s quote suggests, for these young people, “reading is not only there for one thing, you can use it for many different things.” This clever young girl’s sentiment captures O’Donnell’s (1998) words, which are worth repeating: “Reading is not one simple thing, but a related set of activities, each with its own power for enlightenment” (p. 28).

Reading is complex, and readers are multidimensional, and the participants demonstrated this complexity in the stories they shared about the purposes for reading. Overall, the findings showed that reading is meaningful and is embedded in their everyday lives. From their storied accounts, the texts they read have served them well.

Imaginative Identity-Making: “You’re Going Places You’ve Never Been Before”

It is not possible to talk about reading without considering the making of identity. Reading serves as a conduit for identity work and for exploring one’s own identity. Gee (2008) argued that Discourses, or ways of “being in the world,” are connected to “particular identities” (p. 3). As such, people’s identities cannot be separated from the ways they engage in literate reading practices (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). Reece made reference to the importance of reading to her identity when she explained what she learned about herself as a reader from being in the study. She said, “I learned that when I am reading it doesn’t always have to be about the book; I can change it into, like, my life in my actions, and I can, like, get ideas from books and stuff, and I learned how to do that more and be more confident.” The young people in my study shaped and constructed their identities through their everyday social practices as they followed their individual interests through their purposeful choice of texts.

For Reece as well as several other study participants, reading traditional print-based and digital texts fulfilled a function in their lives: It satisfied a need to cultivate their imagination, and it enabled them to explore themselves through the make-believe world of stories. The nature of this kind of reading afforded them opportunities for identity-making. These experiences also fostered new kinds of thinking. The participants often talked about entering a story world, taking on a character, and experimenting with multiple identities. In this way, they created new possibilities for themselves. Reece demonstrated this imaginative identity-making when she

talked about reading as being “good and wonderful” and about how it made her happy. When Reece talked about her reading experiences, she revealed a deep personal engagement with text. For Reece, reading was an emotional and pleasurable experience. She said, “I feel happy when I am reading books, because I can feel like: If the characters are happy, then I can be happy because I am reading the book and I can see what they feel like and stuff.” Reece often spoke about getting inside the story world and into the lives of the characters when she talked about her favorite books. She explained the motivation: “Because you can experience someone else’s lifestyle and stuff, like, feel like what they are going through.” Throughout the study, Reece spoke about how she was totally consumed by the book series *Little House on the Prairie*, a story wherein the author chronicled her childhood in the early 1900’s while living in the western frontier. Reece emphasized how reading the series provided her with valuable play experiences: “Sometimes we play games where we are, like, poor, and if you read, it can help you, like, know what a poor person would do, like to get food or have a shelter.” In our discussions about the series, Reece described how she learned about other people’s lives by putting herself into the story world in an effort to experience life as the characters did:

In the book the two little girls went to see the town for the first time and they were very amazed by it. So I think that would be pretty cool to see a town for the first time ‘cause we see them like almost every day, and I guess, if you live in town or if you go to school, so I think that it would be pretty cool to just be able to see these things for the first time.

Reece talked about her connection with the characters and recounted an occasion when she felt she was able to live life through their eyes:

When they got to the town and they were amazed by all the things that were there. And like, it was like – it was like good and like wonderful because I felt that they were happy ‘cause they got to see and learn something new.

By nature, Reece was inquisitive, and because she had developed an emotional connection and an attachment to the story characters, she felt she had to find out what happened to the people about whom she cared and had invested so much of her time in. Reece told me about her experience with another book in the diary genre, the *Dear Canada* series, and the pleasure she found when she placed herself into the story world:

Well I kind of feel like when I am reading the book – I kind of feel like I am standing there but they don’t see me, or they can’t hear me or anything, but I am watching them and they don’t know it kind of thing.

Reece mentioned how this imaginative identity-making experience was useful in her other pretend play activities. Young people often use the story plot in order to exercise their imagination in their play activities. “When I am reading sometimes, I use the story in the book and change it and use it in a game with my friends, so, ya, it’s fun.” She recalled one particular event: “Me and my friend Cassidy at my lake lot, we like to play all these adventure games outside and, like, on the park, and we would imagine all these things like jungles and castles.” When asked where she got her ideas from, Reece responded, “From books.” When she talked about reading books, she revealed their significance: “And so it’s really important because I like to use my imagination.” Reece revealed that reading enabled her to broaden and intensify her identity-making activities. In another example, Reece shared how reading the book series, *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, motivated her to foster her imagination. “Sometimes I want to do things like what they do, like go outside and just like use my

imagination more.” Reece related, “Like if we were going on an adventure we could kind of use that as an outline or plot.” For Reece, reading provided a host of opportunities for playful and adventurous experiences, which were not possible in the real world. These adventurous escapades enabled her to inhabit strange worlds, assume different identities, and they provided her with unique experiences that helped her think about her own life.

Likewise, when Juliet was asked what motivated her to read, she said, “It’s the stories.” Juliet’s stories of reading revealed that she also enjoyed entering a story world and experimenting with different identities. Juliet shared that she was drawn to the *Dork Diaries* series and described her first experience with the series: “There’s this really mean girl and she picks on this new girl and she thinks she is not going to make it but then she finds two best friends, and they go on these crazy adventures.” Juliet mentioned she related to the book because it was about a girl her age. She explained what she found appealed to her:

It’s kind of funny. And she gets herself into trouble. It’s just about her writing about her day in her diary and some crazy things that happen in school or what happens to her, or just her family and her problems.

Juliet explained that she was interested in reading the book to see how the story characters reacted to the bully’s behavior. When she was prompted to divulge more, Juliet expressed that it would be good to know what to do if she found herself in a similar situation. What Juliet seemed to have implied here is that stories have the power to provide readers like her with a safe way to step into another person’s shoes and to act out what might exist in the real world. She made a similar point when she spoke about the reason she embraced the *Dear Canada* series; it helped her to know how to handle her own life. “I actually got interested in it because she [the main character] had a little sister, and then she died and I felt bad.” Juliet explained that in the story

the little sister was “bossy” and that she related to the story because she had a little sister who was also kind of bossy, whom she described as “sassy.” She told me that reading the series helped her to handle situations in her own family. She was so enamored by the book that she did not want to finish because “I don’t want it to end.” She told me she put it away for a week because “it is really good and I want it to keep on going.” Since it was a library book, she had to renew it so that she could keep it a while longer. What’s noteworthy here is Juliet’s desire to stay in the story world, which is so typical of a reader who is connected to the characters and is invested in the story.

Juliet, like Reece, mentioned how easily they were drawn into the lives of the characters, and they cited the reason they became such avid fans of their favourite series of books: So they could prolong the pleasure. This was also the reason they often re-read their favorites books – so they could venture back into the world of their favorite characters. Juliet embraced reading because it satisfied her need to explore the imaginative and to role-play different characters and this was reflected in her choice of texts.

For Amelia the best thing about reading was definitely the adventure: “Cause you get to do so many things you could never do before.” She expressed this sentiment in the metaphor she selected in her pre-interview activity. “Reading is an adventure; every page you turn something new and exciting happens.” She gave the example the excitement she felt reading a *Theodore Boone* book. “Like if it’s a book – ‘cause you get to do many things you could never do before. Like in *Theodore Boone*, if you put yourself in his place, he’s a lawyer, a kid lawyer, so that’s exciting.” Amelia took great pleasure from assuming the identity of the character and escaping into the story world. She explained, “If there is a main character who said, like, ‘I,’ it’s them telling it. Then you can pretend that you are saying those words.” She offered this explanation to

illustrate what the experience was like for her: “You’re going places you’ve never been before and, like ya, you can do stuff that you never thought you could do. You can kind of put you in his shoes.” Amelia cited Gordon Korman’s book, *Everest*, as one of her favorite books because “it was a fun adventure.” Amelia related that reading allowed her to immerse herself into the story and to “Get away from it all.” But, above all, Amelia maintained that reading served one simple objective: “When I am reading, I always have fun.”

Ben rarely talked about reading in the ways Reece, Juliet, and Amelia talked about escaping into the story world, and he more often mentioned that the best thing about reading is “that it’s not something you have to do, but it’s something that’s fun to do.” However, on the occasions when he described his experience reading the *Hunger Games* series, a dystopian fiction by Suzanne Collins, he revealed his desire to explore the imaginative realm. He talked about being drawn into the action and the suspense: “It was like watching some professional sports games where you don’t know what is going to happen next.” Ben described his experience with the book in this way: “Sort of scary. I don’t know if scary is the right word, but it was like sort of like watching some professional sports game or something, like you are like hoping that this will happen.”

In my conversations with the participants about how they chose their reading materials, they revealed they often chose texts that allowed them to escape and enter into a story world. Getting inside the story was appealing to them. It was for this reason Reece, Amelia, and Juliet all embraced the comic book genre. All three girls expressed their allegiance to and pleasure from entering the quirky world of *Archie* comics, the long-running series of comics first introduced in 1941 by Vic Bloom and Bob Montana. For Amelia, “It’s the only comic I really read.” She said, “We have a lot of them because everybody in my family reads them.” She

mentioned her family had well over two hundred *Archie* comics, which they stored in a huge box in the kitchen so they could access them whenever they wished. She also told me that *Archie* comics were just as popular amongst her circle of friends. When she was asked what motivated her to read *Archie* comics, she grinned and said, “I get a laugh!” She named Jughead as her favourite character because “he is really funny, smart, and he is really nice.” She said she could relate to him because, like herself, he was friends with everyone and did not have any enemies. Reece was drawn to *Archie* comics for similar reasons. She liked the quirky characters and the fact “there’s lots of different books for *Archie*.” Akin to Reece and Amelia, Juliet also likely identified with the characters. When Juliet talked about what she liked about them, she articulated, “They always find elaborate ways to do something when there is always an easier way, or silly things.” She recited the example of Archie and a typical scenario: “Like if he had two dates and he doesn’t just drop one.” Juliet revealed she was someone who was very pragmatic and so her comments about Archie’s inability to solve his problems were not surprising. Juliet also identified with Betty because “She likes to cook and so do I.” As a devoted fan, Juliet placed a great value on *Archie* comics, and this was especially evident when she told me she did not share, trade, or lend them to anyone.

I discovered from my participants that *Archie* comics were not read once and then cast aside; they were savored and read again and again. Amelia explained how this ritual played out in her house: “So we read them and you put them away and get new ones, but then the old ones you re-read sometimes because you forget them.” Juliet was not much different in this regard. She re-read them for one simple reason: “Because some are my favourites.” Juliet’s experience was not unlike those expressed by both Reece and Amelia, in that they all re-read *Archie* comics, to prolong the pleasure of living inside and through the world of *Archie* and his friends.

When the participants talked about the reading comics as well as other traditional print-based text, they talked about it in the same way they talked about their digital and electronic devices. However, there was a major difference, and Reece articulated this when she talked about reading and technology. “On your iPod you don’t really see it as a book, like when you are reading; you just see it as games and stuff. You just think of it as playing the game.”

In discussions with the participants about their gaming pursuits, Amelia articulated that the experience was similar to reading adventure books. “You’re going places you’ve never been before, and you can do stuff that you never thought you could do. ‘Cause if it’s a video game you do that, and in a book you can also do that.” Amelia experienced them as similar because the games, like the adventure books, were constructed as narratives. Even though the other participants did not articulate their experiences with gaming in the same way as Amelia did, they nonetheless demonstrated how their playful pursuits with video games were similar to reading books. One particular video game with which Amelia was particularly enamored, and that provided a source of escape, was *Tiny Towers*, a game about running a tower, developed by NimbleBit. Amelia talked about how she especially enjoyed taking on different roles and how one of the pop-up features in the game lured her to be drawn into the virtual world adventure. “Like there are notifications like on your iPod. Like for *Tiny Towers*, it will send you a notification like, ‘the Smoothie Shop is ready to be re-stocked.’” The following excerpt highlighted a short piece of a lengthy conversation about playing the game:

JW: So you are like a property manager?

A: Hmmm. Cause you go up here and build another floor for \$54,000.

JW: There’s a lot of text in this one, or print?

A: Ya, they say funny things.

JW: It says, “Come to work at the Tattoo Parlor, but nobody is here.” That’s funny.

A: Ya, there’s tons to read.

JW: So when you downloaded the game, how did you find out how to play it?

A: It tells you how to do it kind of.

Of the numerous games Amelia had downloaded on her iPod touch, the one storyline that particularly appealed to her was called *Cut the Rope*, developed by Zepto Lab. She explained that she was enticed to play the game especially because of the added text feature included in the game: “There’s a comic. I have it; it’s the first comic. I have a few of them.” Amelia commented that the comic heightened the pleasure of playing the game because it provided the detailed description of the characters, setting, and the plot. The comic provided the background information so that Amelia could experience the game as if she were the character in the story.

The exchange below illuminated her penchant for the game.

A: I have *Strange Delivery Part 1*. I don’t have this one, *Part 2*.

JW: So the first one – let’s see – you go into that, and then you read the comic?

A: Hmmm. It shows you how to do it.

JW: Okay. So there is a lot to read there. So it’s like a comic book?

A: Ya.

JW: Like a graphic novel?

A: Hmmm!

JW: Are they good comics?

A: Ya! By the way it leaves you, when it ends.

JW: Like a cliffhanger?

A: Ya, 'cause he goes in, the green guy. This guy, he doesn't really like the green guy 'cause he made a mess of everything, so he's there, the green, to show his parents, otherwise he would be in big trouble, so he's going after them, and he goes to the pool and he tries to catch him right after all that; then that's where it ends.

Once again, the exchange below demonstrates how Amelia entered a story world through her gaming pursuits on her iPod touch device while she played a simulation game called *Pocket Frogs*, developed by NimbleBit:

JW: Is this another popular game, *Pocket Frogs*?

A: Hmmm. You can get a *daily gift* and then *help*, There's a ton of stuff.

JW: Okay. What does that tell you?

A: It tells you – it has different topics, 'cause there's the game buttons, there's *frog focuses*, then when you are *breeding frogs*, *the pond*, *getting new frogs*, *mailbox*, *habitat*, and *scenery*. It tells you everything you need to know on the game.

JW: So if you want to be really good at this game, you have to read it to find out how it works?

A: Ya. You can just play randomly and then if you get stuck this will tell you.

Juliet shared her preference for fantasy through her gaming pursuits, namely *Fashion Designer*, a game she played on Facebook. This popular game involved creating an avatar, and it engaged the gamer, in the role of a fashion designer, to design and sell dresses and build a fashion portfolio. In this way, there was an aspect of identity-making to the gaming. Juliet talked about how the game helped her to come to realize that she had a talent for fashion. She was especially proud after both her mother and sister praised her fashion-designing efforts. As an incentive to hone her skills, Juliet related how her mother bought her a sketchbook so that she

could continue to design clothes and pursue her passion for fashion. Juliet also talked about her playful pursuits on a popular online multiplayer video game called *Fantage*, developed by Fantage, Inc., which she played on her home computer. When she described the game, she said, “It’s where you can dress up your character and shop.” In my search, *Fantage* was described as a MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game), a social gaming site, where users customize their own online presence or personal avatar, design clothes, explore virtual worlds, and sustain friendships and meet new friends. For Juliet, the best thing about *Fantage* was “mostly the game,” which she explained in this way: “You get these iPhones in the game, and you can click on other people’s characters and they have information like what TV show they like and their favourite colour.” Juliet was not alone in her fondness for video games. Ben, Katrina, Amelia, and Reece all shared stories where reading provided them opportunities to delve into virtual worlds connected to the video games they chose to play.

Reading traditional print and digital-based texts was meaningful and fulfilled a function in their lives: The nature of this kind of reading afforded them new and exciting opportunities for imaginative identity-making and provided them exciting adventures outside of the confines of the real world.

Learning: “I Like to Be Informed”

When the participants were asked to share their thoughts about reading and its function in their lives, Reece responded, “That you get to learn new things and you get to learn about how other people do things.” All the participants unanimously articulated the same sentiment. Reece summed it up aptly: “Cause some people say that if you read books, even if they aren’t information books, that you get smarter, and I think you do cause you can learn new things.” Amelia echoed this sentiment when she pointed out, “We read to understand things.” For this

group of young people, reading both traditional print and digital-based text, using a variety of platforms, afforded them a wealth of opportunities to learn about things that mattered to them. Reading satisfied their need to know and to be informed. In our discussions about their varied reading interests, I found all the participants to be intensely interested in learning and expanding their funds of knowledge. They all had an insatiable desire to follow their curiosities. Reading served as an avenue to learn vital information, to expand their fund of knowledge, to become the “expert,” and to explore their world and their place in it. Although their pursuits differed in nature, they were similar in that they were purposeful, personally meaningful, and relevant in their lives. In relation to digital text, Reece had this to say about the function of reading in her everyday life: “Like when I was born there was no such thing as no computers and no iPods and stuff, so I think it is important because you’re using like your daily life to learn something.”

Reece was adamant that reading was a way to gain knowledge, and she made this sentiment explicit in her statement: “Like even if you are not reading, like, a fact book or something, you can still learn stuff.” She demonstrated how her reading created opportunities to learn about people, her favorite topic of interest, when she talked about reading “not a fact book” but her favorite diary genre, and especially the book series *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. “I like to read about how other people do things, ‘cause like I kind of compare it to how I do things.” She related her reasoning in the following quote:

I like it that it tells you how they do things. Like it tells you about how they get their food because they live, like, not in a town. They live on their own. So it tells you about how they get around and how they do things around there and what they do to entertain themselves.

When she read stories about other people, she said, “I would imagine how lucky I am to be in the position that I am in now.” Learning about people’s lives was the driving force behind her decision to pick up one of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books. Reece shared how she discovered the series:

When I was at my grandma’s house, I was looking through her books and this was the only one I was old enough to read because all the other ones were like adult books, I guess, and I looked at this one and I started to read it and I liked it.

When Reece was asked to identify a story she found particularly appealing to her, she related one story in the book entitled *The Little Glass Chip*, which she said was special because it helped her to learn how other people do things in their family.

It’s about this family, and the mom always puts out the good china for her family, and one day one of her friends asks if she is having company, but she says no, because her family is special and so they should use the good china for it.

Reece told me that reading nourished her need to learn about other people’s lives, and at the same time, it made her reflect on and appreciate her own life. She explained that this was one reason she read teen magazines and completed the “little quizzes,” because she often compared her life to her favorite pop stars’ lives.

Juliet was no different in that she also had a strong desire to learn. She also had a need to gather vital information, especially about pop culture. She expressed that reading provided an avenue for her to learn about “people and finding out information,” especially about the lives of the members of her favorite boy band, One Direction. Juliet shared that she was particularly fascinated with the widely popular British boy band. Throughout the study, many of our discussions centered on their music and on the lives of the five pop stars, and especially her

favorite one, Niles, “because he is the sweetest one.” Like many girls her age, Juliet was infatuated with the pop stars and knew a great deal of detailed information about their lives. There was no doubt whatsoever that Juliet became an expert on One Direction. She was particularly pleased with herself when she showed me the unauthorized biography book she had purchased, and she shared, “I learned Louis had four sisters...” She related the story of how fortunate she was to have secured the second-last copy of this recently released book at the recent school book fair. The comical part of the story is that Juliet had already purchased a copy of the book through the Scholastic Book Club. When she was asked why she had purchased another copy, she told me she could not wait to read it. When she was asked what she did with the second copy, she responded, “I sold it to one of my friends.” Juliet spoke about the unauthorized biographical book in this way: “It’s good. I’m on, ‘It’s Time to Face the Music’. It’s a chapter in it and it’s quite long.” Juliet’s infatuation with music and the lives of band members from One Direction included an interest in other pop stars. In our discussion about various singer-songwriters, Juliet told me, “If Katy Perry had a book out, I would buy it.” Juliet was also fascinated about knowing about things that were weird. She recounted one weird story she read in the *Ripley’s Believe It Or Not* series of books, which she could not forget: “These animals and, believe it or not, this kid had three ears, and this cow and two heads.” She shared that she was drawn to these books because she had a passion for learning about strange things and because, as she said, “I’m a little bit of an animal lover so it’s interesting, ‘cause if that did happen it would be weird.”

All of the participants indicated that they read to learn new things, and they used a variety of text formats and platforms for this purpose, especially the Internet. As Reece pointed out, “Kids my age are, like, on the Internet quite a bit.” As it is with many young people today, the

Internet has become an integral part of their everyday lives. One reason several participants accessed the Internet was a desire to learn the lyrics to their favorite songs. Juliet told me she often engaged in the practice of looking up the lyrics by her favourite pop stars because she wanted to sing their songs. She said her strategy was to “sit there, read them, and learn the songs.” She explained that her motivation to learn words to two songs, which she described as her “cheering up songs,” was simply so she could sing them on the days she felt down. Katrina’s motivation to learn the lyrics of her favourite songs was also so she could sing the songs of her favourite pop stars. When we discussed her favourite song, Katrina reached into her pocket, pulled out her iPod touch and played the song for me. She proudly said, “This one, I know all the words to it.” She explained her practice for learning her favorite songs: “I just go to the computer, look at the lyrics, and I listen to the song so often that I memorize it.” Reece explained how this practice worked for her: “I search up the lyrics, but I don’t download them onto my iPod or anything. I just look at them and read them and memorize.” From the participants’ perspectives, and as Reece articulated, the reason one learned the lyrics was simply, “so you can sing along.”

Reece also accessed the Internet to search for information about pop culture and her favorite pop stars in order “to keep track of Katy Perry and Taylor Swift.” Reece told me this was a common practice and explained how she personally benefitted. “Cause so I can feel like what they are going through, what they are doing and stuff.” Juliet also regularly accessed Facebook to learn about the lives of her favorite people: “When I go and look at my news feed, there’s always information on people, like One Direction.” Juliet mentioned she got useful information from reading her news feed, and she learned a great deal about her favourite pop stars. This social media platform served as a lifeline to learn what Juliet needed to know.

For Amelia the Internet was just as valuable and useful as a platform to research and verify facts. She illustrated this when she described the time when Benjamin Franklin was introduced into the story plot of the *39 Clues Book One: The Maze of Bones*, by Rick Riordan, and she wanted to find out whether he did what the book said he did. She explained, “Because like if it says something that is really cool, I will check it out to see if that is really there.” Amelia also pointed out how useful the Internet was to learn new things when she recalled the time she was sick and had to miss school. Being a diligent and conscientious student, Amelia explained that she did not want to fall behind in science, so she searched the Internet, “to look up things about science, like photosynthesis.” She explained, “I was sick and they were learning about the water cycle, and so I looked it up to try to figure out what they were doing.” Amelia recalled another situation where she said the Internet was useful:

I also do it with like school work because sometimes my teacher gives us tests and we take them home, and then so I use my resources to look it up and try to find out the actual test so I can check my answers.

Katrina found that the Internet was also useful as a source to find information, and although her motivation differed, she told me she recently accessed the Internet as a consumer, and she commented that the Internet helped her to learn about toys, their price points, and which ones she wanted on her Christmas wish list. Being in the know was just as important to Juliet as the others, and although it was not to read about the latest consumer products, it was to satisfy her curiosity.

Juliet said she often accessed the Internet when she was puzzled about things. She recalled a time when this happened: “Sometimes I listen to my mom and think, ‘what does that mean?’, and then she says, well I really don’t know, so then we go and I look it up on the

Internet.” She explained the activity involved “going on Google” and then, “I go to the first thing that pops up, and if that’s not it, then I go to the next one, and if that is it, then I read it.” Though it was not always a sure-proof strategy, Juliet told me that in her experiences the Internet proved to be a fast and resourceful platform and a reliable source to find the information she needed.

Katrina was a frequent user of the Internet, and as a platform to access information, the Internet provided her with all she needed to know about her favourite boy band, Big Time Rush, and specifically one member, James Maslow: “I just searched James Maslow facts.” Katrina revealed what a big fan she was when she showed me his picture emblazoned on the home screen of both her iPad and her iPod touch digital devices. The following is a short excerpt of a longer conversation, in which Katrina demonstrated how she used the Internet, and in particular how useful YouTube was as a platform, to learn and become an expert on her favourite boy band, Big Time Rush, and one member in particular:

K: I know where he was born and all his – like he dances; he’s a ballerina.

He’s um, well he dances salsa, ballet, hip hop, swing.

JW: And how did you find all that out?

K: YouTube, and then I just searched James Maslow facts.”

JW: And that gave you all that information?

K: Ya. He dances.

JW: You read that all on YouTube?

K: Ya. That’s his birthday and his occupation.

JW: Okay. Let’s go to the next screen.

K: His performing skills are improvisation, dancing, stunts, martial arts, stage combat, juggling, motorcyclist, singing, diving, voice over, whistling, and firearms.

JW: Yes, it says, he grew up in La Jolla, California, and lived in New York.

K: And he's 6'1" tall, he weighs 158 lbs, and he's athletic. His hair colour is brown, his eye colour is hazel, his – well he's Caucasian. His voice type is tenor. He plays piano, drums, and guitar.

Apart from becoming an expert on pop culture, Katrina was very enthusiastic when she talked about learning new languages. During the home literacy dig, she told me she wanted to learn Spanish, French, and Turkish, and she showed me the three language program apps she downloaded on her iPad for the purpose of learning the vocabulary: "It's just like quizzes, and you have to answer them." When she was asked why she wanted to learn Turkish, being that it was not a universal language, Katrina shared, "Because my friend speaks Turkish at her house and I want to understand what she is talking about." Katrina told me she became interested in French while learning it in school and that Spanish was useful to know, and she recalled how valuable it was on a recent family trip to Mexico. Not only was Katrina interested in learning languages, she was also curious about her world, which she revealed when she commented that she had an interest in maps. During the literacy dig, she told me that she used her maps app on her iPod touch to "just look around to see different places."

Amelia was also fascinated with maps in addition to clocks from different time zones, and this was evident in the two excerpts below, from a conversation about how she used her iPod touch and the iPad she shared with her family.

A: On this page, I look at maps.

JW: What is it about maps you like?

A: I just like finding out about places.

JW: Like if you are going somewhere?

A: Well sometimes I just look up a random place and just look around.

Here is an excerpt that highlighted Amelia's fascination with clocks:

A: And then, there are the world clocks. I have our time, then Ottawa's time, Montreal's time, Vancouver, and New York, Calgary, Dublin, Ankara – I think that is in Turkey – Honolulu, Canton, Tokyo, Houston, and Tunis.

JW: And why do you have those clocks?

A: Well, I have a friend who is from Turkey. She is in my class. And I've been to Houston, so I got that when I was in Houston. Tokyo I did for fun. Canton, I think I was trying to find something else, but it went on Canton. And Tunis: I learned about Tunis in grade 2. Ya, Tunisia. Tunis is the capital city; it's in Africa.

JW: So you like to know what time it is in other places in the world?

A: Hmm. I like to know the time so I can compare.

Amelia was a high achiever, and being identified as a good student was important to her and is why she made it her goal to stay on top of her studies. Knowing Amelia was driven to do well in school and wanted to maintain her honors standing, it was not a surprise to learn that one of the uses she had for the Internet was to check her school tests in order to remain skilled in all of her school subjects.

Ya, I also do it with, like, school work, because sometimes my teacher gives us tests and we take them home, and so I use my resources to look it up and try to find out the actual test so I can check my answers.

Juliet also talked about how Pinterest provided her with a virtual platform to learn about the things about which she was curious, like art, travel, fashion, and, especially, animals. From my own research, I discovered Pinterest is a social media platform tool co-founded in 2010 by

Ben Silbermann with Evan Sharp and Paul Sciarra, where millions of users follow people and collect visual images and content of topics of interest, or as they are called, *pins*, and organize them into personalized category boards. Juliet told me her mother introduced to her to Pinterest. Once Juliet discovered that it was a “fun way to learn lots of information,” she asked her mother to help her set up her own account. When Juliet was asked what she liked about Pinterest, she said, “There’s sweet, cute things,” and “Cool stuff to make.” Juliet was especially drawn to the site because of her fascination with animals. She explained she particularly liked “the ones about how an animal saves a person or a person saves an animal.” Juliet was not alone in her use of Pinterest as a platform to learn new things and to discover new interests. Reece was also a big fan of this popular knowledge-sharing site. When asked what she liked about this online social platform, she mentioned she often searched for beauty sites in order to “get hair ideas and stuff.”

Although Ben was not a user of Pinterest, he accessed the Internet to gain information. He told me he regularly went on the Internet to search for not only recipes, like for cookies he wanted to bake, but also things about which he was curious and interested in learning. He gave the example of one occasion when he wanted to know how much his old iPod touch was worth, because he wanted to sell it and buy a newer model. He went online to search for the fair market price so he would know how much he could get for his device. On another occasion, he searched the Internet for a banking website because he was curious to find out how much his American money was worth. He also searched the Internet in order to find new video games to play.

Reece also liked to be informed about the world around her, which is why she made it a practice to not only access information through digital print and online platforms but the old fashioned way, by reading traditional print-based text like the local newspaper, flyers, and any of the permission forms and school newsletters she brought home. She described herself as being a

curious person and chuckled when she recalled the time she brought home the lengthy information letter about my research study. She told me she had to read it to her mom because, as she said, “My Mom was too lazy to, so I had to.”

Becoming an expert was especially apparent when Ben, Reece, and Amelia talked about a particular video game they enjoyed playing. Ben self-identified as a gamer and said that he often accessed the Internet and YouTube to search for tutorials in his pursuit to become better skilled at *Minecraft*. Ben explained how the tutorials worked: “It’s usually like a visual, like someone will – like they’ll be a tutorial or something, so someone will be like: if you do this.” He mentioned that the tutorials were mostly visual and auditory although there was also a print component. “You can set it so there’s translation on YouTube.” The translation feature allowed the user to read along with the auditory component of the tutorial while he or she viewed some aspect of the game being played. Ben told me he accessed the translation feature of the tutorial only when he needed to do so. When the game became too complicated, Ben likely realized that he could always depend on the print translation to help him acquire the skills he needed. Reece also accessed the Internet in her search for *Minecraft* tutorial videos in her quest to be a better gamer, because “I like watching other people playing *Minecraft* to get new ideas to see how to build different things and stuff.” Amelia also revealed her desire to become better skilled at the games she played. She explained this was one of the reasons she accessed the Internet. “I would look up – like sometimes if I am stuck on a level I would look up hints for it.” She explained that she used the Internet to search for tutorials, or cheats as they are called. “Sometimes I look up the cheats, but the cheats that I go on, they tell you how to do it and teach you so you can actually know.” She was adamant that she did not use cheat sheets herself: “Oh no I don’t want cheat sheets for my PS3 game.” She instead often helped her brother: “I just tell him what to do.”

Sometimes I look up the cheats. I have to look up the cheat for my brother's PS3 games 'cause he gets stuck and because he tells me to do it [laughs] and I do. I'm like the manager, kind of. When one brother plays, me and the other brother are managers.

Amelia related another story where her desire was to become an expert. While taking on the identity of crusader of healthy living in her household, Amelia made it her mission to learn about healthy eating. For Amelia, leading a healthy lifestyle was important, and choosing to eat healthy foods was critical, which is why she made it a habit to read food labels. She related a funny story about reading labels when her dad brought home a jar of his favorite pickles, and she told him they were manufactured for a Canadian company but not made in Canada.

My dad was eating these pickles and he said, "These are good," and I said, "Dad you shouldn't be buying these because you don't know what's in them." So he read, they are made in India, and he's like, "What!" So he picked up the pickles and threw them in the garbage!

Amelia told me that as a result of her vigilance, her Dad started to read the labels of food products he brought home, because "he knew that I would check." Because her family decided they would buy locally, reading labels became important to members of Amelia's family. Being health conscious was also the reason Amelia questioned whether she should use a brand of mouthwash her mother bought, because she knew that some mouthwashes contained alcohol. When she checked the label, she found out that although it did not contain alcohol, it read, "Not to be used for children 12 and under." Given that she was just short of twelve, she wondered whether it was safe to use. She said, "I told my mom and she said, you've been using it for a while and you're fine." Amelia told me that she read labels because she wanted to know what she put into her body, and as she said, "I like to be informed." For Amelia, reading not only

served as a conduit to a healthy lifestyle; it also served as an avenue for personal development. When Amelia talked about being eleven, she mentioned that the best thing about it was having more responsibility. She added that it also allowed her to get her babysitting certificate. Her intention was to become a skilled and competent babysitter, and by obtaining her babysitting qualifications, she could babysit and earn money. She told me she had another motivation to take the course: “I wanted to get it because, my brother, he got his when he was eleven, and so I wanted to get it the same age.” Being so competitive, it was important for Amelia to do better than her brother. “He got 80% on the test, so I wanted to beat that mark.” And, she did, as she excitedly informed me: “I got 100%!”

From the stories the participants shared, it was clear that reading afforded each of them with a variety of opportunities to learn about things that mattered to them. Reading served as a conduit not only for them to gather information and to gain knowledge about things they needed to know about; it also provided a means for them to become the “expert” in their areas of interest. Just as reading enabled them to learn, it also enabled them to follow various intellectual pursuits.

Intellectual Engagement: “When You Think It’s Going One Way, It Changes”

When the participants shared their stories of reading, they revealed their interest for solving problems and figuring things out. They had an intense desire to challenge themselves and to test their knowledge and skills. Their need for competition was fierce, and they embraced the challenges they faced, whether they were engaged in traditional print-based or digital text. Reading fulfilled a function in their lives: It satisfied a need to be intellectual, and it enabled them to use their minds and to hone their thinking and problem-solving skills. Amelia often spoke about the thrill of figuring things out and solving story plots, especially when she talked

about reading traditional print-based text. Amelia was naturally competitive in many aspects of her life, and reading enabled her to challenge herself intellectually. Out of all of the participants, she was the most articulate about the pleasure she experienced when solving the problem and unraveling the plot. She explained, “If it is a mystery, I always think of a solution before I read the solution. I try to figure out the mystery. I thought about it in my head and it was what I thought about it.” Amelia talked about one of the fantasy book series in which she was interested, *Secret of Grimm Hill* by Linda DeMeulemeester, and the personal satisfaction she felt when she solved the story puzzle: “It was interesting because there were all these twists and turns in the plot, because when you think it is going to end this way, it changes.” Although Amelia was drawn to the series because of her affinity for adventure and the pleasure she experienced in figuring out the plot, she said she did not finish the series. She said, “Sometimes I get bored, and I read the back of the book, and then I just know how it ends.” For Amelia, once the pursuit of a challenge was gone and the solution was evident, she soon lost interest and moved onto something that challenged her more. In our discussion of a book series that continued to challenge her intellectually, Amelia simply could not contain her excitement as she revisited the reading event: “One time I was reading *39 Clues*, and then I thought of something in my head, and I read the next paragraph, and it was what I thought in my head!” The discussions about the *39 Clues* book series first came up during an interview, when Amelia was asked about her weekend. With a burst of delight that was so typical of Amelia’s nature, she recounted her recent problem-solving reading adventure:

I started a new series of books, *39 Clues*. These kids have to get these clues to get this secret of how their family became so powerful, and the winner to get all those clues gets

the ultimate power, and there's a bunch of cousins gunning for it, and these cousins are evil!

Amelia described how totally consumed she was by the series: "I finished the first two and I started the third one. I think there are twelve and then some follow-up ones." Amelia wanted to prolong her intellectual escapades, and this was evident when she was asked whether she planned to read the entire series. She excitedly responded, "I'm trying!" She mentioned that her older brother had read all the books in the series, "so we have a lot of them." Two months later, while we were sitting in Amelia's kitchen during the home literacy dig, the topic of her reading the *39 Clues* series came up again. With a huge grin on her face, Amelia proudly pointed to *Book Seven* on the table, giggled, and said, "I am all done this one that was in my brother's room." Amelia told me that her older brother often hid books under his bed when he knew that she wanted to read them. She also told me how she outsmarted her brother when she found the book and read it before he realized it was missing from under the bed. She said that she felt like a real detective who solved the case of the missing book. To add to the appeal of the series, the publisher released a collection of cards to assist the reader to unlock the clues and solve the puzzle. When I asked Amelia about the usefulness of the cards in solving the adventure, her response was simple and straightforward, "You can get what you need out of the book." In real life, like in her reading adventures, Amelia loved the challenge of the hunt and never shied away from an invitation to be challenged intellectually.

Amelia enjoyed solving problems and the challenge of being tested, and this was evident when she spoke about another book in the adventure genre, one she had recently discovered:

Right now I am reading a book from the author John Grisham. He's doing a kid series, and it's *Theodore Boone*. It's like a murder mystery. There's two books right now:

There's the kid lawyer that I'm reading. And the next one is the abduction.

Amelia explained, "I like solving things." She described her experience of reading as "sort of like being a detective." She revealed that she liked to get inside the mind of the character in order to understand how the character thinks so she could figure out how to solve the problem. From all accounts, Amelia was incredibly adept at getting inside the lawyer mind of Theodore Boone and solving the mystery.

Similar to Amelia, Ben also enjoyed figuring things out and solving a puzzle. He illustrated this appeal when he discussed reading *The Hunger Games* series of books. He shared that he was particularly engrossed by the characters in *The Hunger Games* because "whatever they do, there are usually consequences." What he found the most exciting about the series was the challenge of figuring out what might happen to the character as a result of his or her actions. He found reading about the game riveting because "it's like they are all, like, in the arena and they can't leave until it's over." He told me the plot was not just about a sports game; it was about "staying alive." He said he found that this aspect particularly intensified the pleasure of reading the series.

Unlike Ben and Amelia, Juliet, Reece, and Katrina did not articulate any stories where they demonstrated how they used reading traditional print-based text for purposes to follow various intellectual engagement pursuits. However, they clearly expressed how they used texts for these purposes when they engaged in their various digital and online practices – namely, their gaming adventures. Juliet, Reece, and Katrina all enjoyed the pursuit of a challenge, and this was realized in their gamesmanship when using their various digital technologies. For example, Juliet

was hooked on a Facebook game, called *Triviador*, developed by Hungarian Studio THX Games PLC, one she demonstrated during the home literacy dig. She described it as a game “where you, like, go against these people all around the world and the game board is a map.” This multiplayer online strategy problem-solving game involved conquering territories by answering trivia questions to beat your opponent. Juliet told me that although she liked the fun aspect of the game, she enjoyed the competitive nature of game and the chance to challenge herself. She said, “Like they ask you questions about things about the Earth.” The following quote highlights the way she played the online game:

It’s just random. When you go in to set up a new game, they just pick somebody. You have a castle and these little guys. You have four rounds at the beginning, and you have to answer these questions, and the first person to answer gets it right. Like you take the piece of the puzzle, and the person that has the most land wins.

When Juliet played *Triviador*, she found the questions were quite difficult and were a good test of her knowledge, which, together with the competitive aspect of the game, further enhanced the pleasure of playing the game. Similarly, Reece told me about a video game that challenged her intellectually, one she played on her home computer, called *Family Feud*, developed by Ludia, Inc. She explained how it worked: “Like we asked 100 people and the most common answers for this question was – and then you have to guess it.” Another one of her favorite video games, and one she often played on her iPod touch, was called *Logo Quiz* by AticoD Entertainment, S.L. Reece explained how it worked: “It will show you part of the logo on the top and then you have to guess what it is. It’s kind of like a multiple choice question.” Reece indicated that she enjoyed both these games because they tested her knowledge and made her think. Just as much as she enjoyed being challenged, Reece also enjoyed extending an invitation to others in a game of

challenge. When Reece talked about some of her favorite games she played on her iPod touch, she articulated why one particular game, called *Bike Race*, by Top Free Games, appealed to her:

You can challenge your friends or you can go single player, and you click on a place that you've unlocked, and you can go on a level. It tells you how to play. They are lots of fun, and I see a lot of my friends play it.

The intellectual engagement opportunities that reading afforded the other participants through their gaming pursuits were similar for Katrina. Katrina told me her mother had downloaded video games on her Samsung Galaxy smartphone because they would provide her with time-consuming adventures during the downtime between dance competitions. When she talked about the games, it was evident that she was not only attracted to the problem-solving aspect of the game but also to the scaffolding features included in the game, as she illuminated in her quote about one particular favourite: "It is actually quite cool, 'cause I also figured out how to do it, 'cause it shows you, like, how to do it, and it gives you the answers for it."

When Ben talked about his gaming exploits, though he indicated that for him gaming was mainly "to fill up his time" and just for purposes of fun, he demonstrated that gaming afforded him with opportunities to be challenged, and in this regard he was not unlike his fellow participants. Ben had approximately 20 to 30 games downloaded on his iPod touch, and he played them all. In his opinion, the best one was *Game Box*. In a rare display of enthusiasm, Ben described this particular game: "It's a bunch of games. This one has forty different games. I usually play this game *Dino Cup*, or *Motorcross Tricks*." The former was developed by Triniti Interactive Limited and the latter by IriySoft and Addicting Games. Ben talked about another video game, one at which he was particularly skilled and that consumed a great deal of his time, called *Minecraft*. He told me he was particularly captivated by the building and designing aspect

of the game because it required a great deal of strategic thinking. This hugely popular video game, created by Mojang AB founder Markus Persson, involved building civilizations with blocks in a 3D virtual environment. When Ben was asked how he learned to play the video games he played, he said, “Most of the games are pretty easy, and there’s like an instruction thing.” From all accounts, Ben clearly enjoyed being challenged and this complex and complicated game provided him with many opportunities to be tested intellectually.

Reading traditional print and digital-based texts fulfilled a function in the participants’ lives – it nourished their strong need to be challenged, to be tested, and the nature of this kind of reading afforded them opportunities for exciting and thought-provoking intellectual engagement.

Social Life: “Me and My Cousin, We Play a lot on My iPod”

Reading is embedded in everyday social lives and, thus, is best understood as a social practice. When the participants shared stories of their reading, they revealed an intense desire to form connections with other people. Reading was meaningful, purposeful and fulfilled a function in their lives; it satisfied a need for social relationships. For the participants in this study, reading was situated in the social networks and relationships they desired to maintain and nurture. In addition to the varied ways the participants used traditional, print-based text to sustain and promote new types of social relationships and interactivity with family and friends, the participants’ stories also revealed the social nature of reading when they demonstrated the many reading events that revolved around the uses of digital texts on a variety of digital and electronic devices, in particular their engagement with a valued tool of their culture, their iPod touch digital devices. As the participants’ stories unfolded, it was unmistakably apparent that their everyday reading was a social practice that was deeply intertwined in social relations.

My iPod touch – “It has everything I need.” In relation to digitized culture, when Reece spoke about her generations’ everyday interaction with technology, she clearly highlighted the social possibilities that existed when she said, “Like, almost everybody in grade 6, 7, and 8 has an iPod, or an iPhone, or an iPad or something.” This was especially evident when the participants talked about their varied uses of their digital mobile devices, and in particular their iPod touch. Amelia clearly articulated the importance of an iPod touch as a social tool with tremendous benefits when she was asked about the best thing about owning one: “Everything, I love it!” As Amelia put it, “It has everything I need.” She was not the only one who regarded the iPod as the esteemed “go to” digital device. Ben reinforced the importance of owning an iPod touch when he recalled when a friend obtained his first.

I remember two years ago my friend got an iPod for Christmas, but, like, after he was like, “Oh, you can do this on your *iPod*,” and I was like, “That’s cool,” and stuff, and then I sort of wanted an iPod.

Ben summed it up succinctly: “Most kids have an iPod touch or they want one.” Ben vividly recalled getting his in the fourth grade, and he was a trendsetter in this regard: “I think when I got my iPod, there were only a few kids in my class, I think, who had one.” According to Katrina’s calculation, 90% of kids in her class had an iPod in grade 6, and after Christmas, she happily became one of them. She could not have been clearer when she explained its importance, “So I can fit in with my friends because they all have iPods,” and when she stressed, “I wouldn’t have anything to do [if I didn’t have one]. I would have to play on theirs.” Prior to receiving her own iPod touch for Christmas, Katrina shared an iPod touch with her brother. She said she found it frustrating when it was not her turn to use it, because she felt left out when all her friends were playing on their devices during recess. Reece mentioned that her iPod touch rarely left her side

and was usually “either in my pocket or in my hand or like sitting on the table by me or something.” When she talked about her various uses of technology, she pointed to the iPod touch as a favorable identity marker with important social benefits:

Like, when I am reading, like sitting there with a book – some people may think this is just from the, like, movies and stuff, but people might think you are nerdy [laughs], and then if you see somebody, like, on their iPod, you might think that they are not so nerdy [laughs].

As far as Reece was concerned, it was especially important to have an iPod on the bus because, as she pointed out, “practically everyone is playing on it.” Clearly, they relied on the iPod for their day-to-day social activities and to fit into their social network of friends. For Juliet, it was particularly difficult not to own one, since all her friends did. This was evident when she was asked why she wanted one: “There’s this app you can get to chat with people, and everybody is doing it right beside each other. So I’m like, ‘I wonder what they are doing.’” Because Juliet did not own an iPod touch, she was not able to connect with her friends in this communicative space. Although she did not articulate explicitly that she did not have one because her family could not afford one, she did say they were very expensive. From my experiences, children do not often want anyone to know that they come from a family in financial need. This was an area where it seemed that socio-economic status may affect one’s ability to participate in a literacy community.

There was no doubt the iPod touch was a highly valued possession which they relied on for their day-to-day activities. In fact, each of the four participants who owned one vividly recalled the day they got their devices. Amelia’s story was particularly memorable: “I remember, ya. I do remember it because it was in the box.” And she further recollected:

“I was always playing with theirs [her brothers’] and I wanted my own, so I had to do these things to get the letters spelled out, and I hadn’t got it done yet, but my dad brought me to this restaurant, and then he gave it to me, and I’m like, “Yeahhh”!

And our exchange continued like this:

JW: What do you mean you had to spell out the letters?

A: Like iPod. Like i-p-o-d. And I got to *o* and he just gave it to me.

JW: So what did you have to do?

A: Like I had to do something to earn the letter.

JW: What kind of things did you have to do?

A: Shovel the walk. There were different things all the time.

As Amelia and the other participants demonstrated, to own an iPod touch was especially important because of its social value. In their school, sixth grade marked the initiation to junior high, and with it came a number of special privileges. One of them was the opportunity for students to “bring out” their iPod touch during breaks. Reece said it was during this time “most kids are on their iPods.”

As far as the participants were concerned, the iPod touch was a highly cherished and treasured digital mobile device that, as a tool, provided social benefits and a means for social interaction and online connectivity. Reece was, however, the only one who mentioned she used the Kik messaging application (app) that she downloaded on her iPod touch in order to connect with her friends: “See, if I wanted to text my friend Dev [pseudonym], then I would like – she was texting me earlier. Then I would just tap here and the keyboard would come up.” When Reece was asked why Kik was important to her, she responded, “Because I get to talk to friends.” She recalled her first time: “Because I was, like, finding all my friends and texting them

‘cause I was so excited to have Kik and stuff.” She talked about the endless possibilities for group interaction: “And like you can – like, say I am talking to someone; I can go and say: This person, they can come into our conversation so that we are all talking.” Reece was a big fan of social media and networking in online communities, and she used her iPod touch device to connect with friends through social networking platforms like Facebook (developed by Mark Zuckerberg, 2004) *and* Instagram (developed by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, 2010). Reece told me that Instagram is like Facebook, but it involves posting pictures and writing comments. She said, “The only way you can talk to someone is in the comments of the pictures you have taken.” Reece revealed that posting pictures was a way she could represent herself to the world, and she liked it when her friends and family responded. She described how it worked:

So if I go here ...it’s like this is my profile of Instagram and on Instagram you can follow people. Like if I know – like, say you are on Instagram and I am on Instagram, I can go to your profile like this and follow you. That means whenever I post a picture you can see it, or if you post a picture I can see it.

Reece indicated that she mainly used her device to go on Instagram and Facebook, and she explained that she was deeply interested in people and in connecting with her friends. She told me she used Facebook daily; however, she had not accessed it for several weeks, and she could not demonstrate its use because she was grounded. Reece explained why: “My mom said she is going to take my Facebook away for a while. That’s so I can do more things like reading or going outside and stuff.” Being that Reece identified as an experienced and avid user of Facebook, the way she talked about its significance in her social life was not unexpected:

Well it's kind of important because I can communicate with my friends and I can tell people stuff that I am doing, but it is not as important to me as, like, how I need food and water, 'cause I don't need Facebook, but I want it. And that's the difference.

When asked about being grounded, she said, "I can live without Facebook, but it's nice to have it. But I'm still sad about it." Reece told me she regularly checked her Facebook and used it in several ways: "To read what other friends are saying" and "To look at people's status and stuff, and then talk to friends for messaging and stuff." Reece explained *status* in this way:

Like, you can write a status, like "I'm going to my friend's house today, can't wait," then all your friends can see that and they can *like* it or they can comment on it, like, "Whose friends are you going to?" or something like that.

Reece told me she had over a hundred Facebook friends with whom she communicated, although she interacted with only a select group of friends on a regular basis. She described a fairly typical scenario:

Well it depends, because sometimes I will go on and see, like, who, like of my friends, are on Facebook, and depending on who is on, I might stay longer and talk to them or I might just, like, write a status and then go out and do something else.

And one other: "Sometimes if one of my friends posts a status on Facebook, I will tell my other friend to go look at it because I thought it was funny." When Reece was asked about the content of the posts, she explained the posts were usually about things she and her friends were excited about, learned, or just wanted to talk about, like TV shows, celebrities, and pop stars. In relation to her friends' typical posts, she said, "Most of my friends post stuff about bands and what they like and stuff." As a social networking platform, this practice not only afforded Reece the possibilities to interact and exchange information and knowledge online with her friends, but it

also served as an avenue for shared activity when her friends visited. Reece told me that she and her friend often went on Facebook to interact with their other friends. “If we both have like Facebook or something that involves the computer or iPods, then we sometimes go on them and, like, see what our other friends are saying and stuff.”

Computer use. Juliet and Ben were more recent users of Facebook, which they accessed on their home computers. Ben said he used this social platform to “sometimes check what my friends are up to and see what is happening with friends and stuff.” Juliet said she used Facebook “mainly for games” as well as to occasionally “chat with my friend.” Juliet accessed Facebook on her home computer in order to stay connected, but in a slightly different way – that is, to find out what other people were doing. She told me she often went on her news feed to read about things she needed to know. “Ya, people make pages and then they post pictures. And sometimes, these girls, they make up these stories about them and if you were their best friend or boyfriend.” Juliet revealed it was important to fit in, and this particular online social platform afforded her opportunities to make critical social connections.

Reece and Juliet both highlighted their involvement with other people when they shared their own experiences with Pinterest, an online platform for social interaction, specifically designed for knowledge exchange, where users follow people and topics of interest. Reece related that since she did not have her own personal account, her mother often invited her to join her on the home computer when she browsed various topics of shared interest. Likewise, this was a common social practice with Juliet and her mother. Juliet told me that her mother often summoned her over to the computer to read about some of the “cool stuff” she found that was interesting. Later, her mother often asked for her help to make something they had read about, like “a new cake recipe, a craft, or Christmas stuff.”

As important as these popular digitized communicative spaces were to them, as all participants expressed, the participants were also very much involved in other social interactions that revolved around reading events and one, in particular, being their gaming pursuits with their friends and family using a variety of digital and electronic platforms.

Gaming pursuits. The social purposes of reading were evident in Katrina's stories where the desire to cultivate relationships centered on her gaming. One such event took place during recess, when Katrina and her friends were sitting together and playing video games. She recalled the social interaction: "We always, like, play games we can play in a group – where we take turns with each other." Katrina talked about one such game, where "you type in two names and they show you how much love compatibility they have." Katrina told me she did not have the game, but she was desperate to get it, and her reason clearly revealed her desire to be included in her network of friends: "Because when anyone wants to use my iPod, they just use another kid's iPod since they have it." Katrina related another shared activity around text, when she and a friend were using her new iPad tablet device to learn to speak different languages. She described the event in this way: "When I was in lyrical dance class, me and my friend were doing Spanish and Turkish, and we just couldn't stop because it was just so much fun, and we didn't stop." The social aspects of reading were just as evident in another example Katrina shared, and this time it involved her cousin: "Me and my cousin, we play a lot on my iPad and my iPod, 'cause he likes to play. Well, we usually have competitions or something on the games since I have them on the iPad." Katrina also accessed her computer because it provided another avenue to interact with her cousin in a gaming environment. One particular website offered her variety of fun games to play: "Me and my cousin sometimes go on the computer and search out games like *Cool Math*

Games or *Amazing Games*.” Katrina recalled another occasion when she and a girlfriend sat at the computer together and played the same math video games. She described scenario:

We were playing on my grandpa’s computer – it’s downstairs in his room – and we were playing the *Amazing Games* or something, and we started playing, and then we got hooked on it for like six hours.

When Katrina was asked whether the video games involved print, she explained that they did: “It’s visual and print because you have to, like, read the orders and you have to read out what they want.” Additionally, about another popular game she regularly played with her friend on her Xbox device, Katrina said this about the reading involved: “Ya, there’s reading, because there’s these signs that pop up and you have to read them, and then, like, certain stuff because you have to read *first aid* and stuff.” The social aspect of reading was also apparent when Amelia talked about the many video games she played with her friends on several of her mobile and electronic devices. “I have one game on my PS3; it’s called *Little Big Planet*. It’s like, you have to go on these adventures, to do these things.” When Amelia talked about this particular video game, she highlighted why she was drawn to it: “It’s fun. I played it with my friend when she came over, and we were on it for hours, and we were just laughing and everything.” Amelia also talked about how she used her home computer and highlighted a scenario where she and her friends played another popular multiplayer online virtual world video game called *Fantage*, a game where personalized avatars interact and socialize with each other in a lifelike setting through digitized writing:

Sometimes my friend will tell me to go on at a certain time, and there’s a lot of people on the user thing, and so you can still see them, and like, you have to send a friend request, and the person has to accept it, and then you can send gifts back and forth.

When she was asked about the amount of print involved in this game as well as in the other games she enjoyed and played, Amelia indicated that it varied, but there was always print to read; whether to communicate with other users, for instructions to advance in the game, or to play the game. She highlighted the textual nature of the games when she described the *Fantage* game: “When it first comes on they tell you a bunch of stuff, when you go and buy an egg for a pet, what kind of egg, there’s a bunch of kinds.”

As enthusiastic as Amelia was about her gaming and the social opportunities it afforded her, so too was Juliet, who was also an avid player of the *Fantage* game as well as *Fashion Designer*, both of which offered her countless hours of social interactivity. The social aspect of reading was again transparent when Juliet, a big fan of *Triviador*, a multiplayer trivia game, talked about how she often played the game on Facebook with her mother as they sat together at the home computer in the living room while they tested their knowledge against other players around the world. Juliet told me that her mother was the reason she eventually decided she wanted her own Facebook account. The social aspects of reading were also evident in Reece’s desire to cultivate relationships, and she demonstrated her intentions when she showed me her iPod touch and talked about her gaming pursuits. Reece related one particular time when she and a friend played a logo quiz video game together on the bus on the way home from school. “I like to play with my friend Carl [pseudonym] on the bus.” When Reece, Juliet, Amelia, and Katrina talked about the participatory role they played in their respective gaming pursuits on their various electronic and digital devices, they revealed the social aspects of reading. Only Ben was different in this regard. When he talked about his various digital and electronic activities, he indicated that he often played alone and rarely played with his friends. He replied, “No, not really, not usually” when asked about this. Though Ben indicated that he rarely, if ever, engaged

in this type of social interaction, when he was asked during one of the interviews whether he ever talked to his friends about what he reads, he revealed something significant. He said, “No, but we sometimes talk about video games.”

When the study participants shared their stories of their varied gaming pursuits, they also revealed that they not only played video games, but their interactions with their friends often involved talking about the video games they played. Amelia highlighted this type of social activity when she talked about her favorite game: “I have a few friends that are on the *Fantage* game with me. So we talk about that.” This activity was also mentioned by the other participants. For example, Reece talked about riding on the school bus with her friend Carl [pseudonym]. She explained that most students who rode the bus either played games on their iPod touch, or as she said, “They talked about stuff that’s on their iPod.” She described a familiar social interaction: “Sometimes they might be, like, telling somebody that they like this game, and that maybe they should get it or something. Or they talk about, like, their games, like a level they might not be able to pass.” What Reece pointed out was the social support and the scaffolding that was built into their gaming pursuits, which served to heighten the playing experience. Amelia described a social interaction with her brothers when she searched for tutorials to help her older brother become better skilled at the games he played. “Sometimes I look up the cheats, but the cheats that I go on, they tell you how to do it and teach you so you can actually know.” She described her role in this way. She said her role was fairly straightforward: “He tells me to do it and I do it.” And afterwards, when she acquired the skills she needed, “I just tell him what to do.” In relation to this common social practice, Reece pointed out that she and her friends not only talked about the video games they played, but they also talked about their participation in other

online environments like Facebook. She said, “Sometimes we talk about, like on Facebook, a status like something we read, or a text message that we got or something.”

Other online activities. The participants revealed they often engaged in reading events through their everyday social interactions with their family and friends in other online activities. Juliet described a scenario that revolved around reading, when she, her sister, and her mother decided to search YouTube because they wanted to know the name of a song they heard on a television program.

There was this time we went on YouTube and I looked up this thing, ‘cause me, my sister, and my mom, we were watching this show called *Glee* and I really liked this one song even though I never watched *Grease*...I don’t know what it was called.

When she described how she accessed the site: “It worked, and I went into the lyrics to read.” Juliet was not the only YouTube regular; Amelia was one as well, and she made this clear when she was asked whether she frequented the site: “Oh ya. [laughs] Of course I do!” When Amelia talked about her activities on YouTube, she mentioned that she and her girlfriends often went on together and searched for topics in which they had a shared interest. Amelia also participated in other online social interactivity and often accessed her mother’s email account to keep in touch with the friends she met during a family vacation on a cruise to the Caribbean. She said, “My mom has Gmail, and I have my friends who are on that. I met them on a vacation that I went on.” Amelia mentioned that her mother was always present when she communicated with her friends. “She’s there when I do my emailing, but not games or for YouTube.” As the only way to maintain and nurture these newly formed friendships, she said, “We email back and forth to each other because I can’t visit them because one lives in L.A. and one lives in Wisconsin, I think.” She described the social interaction: “I check my Gmail about once a week, and if they email me

back, then I email them.” Amelia indicated their conversations were usually about their everyday lives. Amelia told me she found their interactions particularly meaningful because she was interested in other how other people lived. She described their interactions: “Like I answer their questions, ask questions, and talk about things.”

Apart from Amelia’s social interactions with friends, her other online practices in the home involved interactions with her mother. Amelia mentioned that she often frequented a school website on the computer with her mother: “My mom goes on that, and I look with her, and it shows how I am, like, doing in school.” Amelia explained that she and her mother regularly went on the school website to access *Home Logic* in order to read about school events, to check up on her assigned homework, and to access her school records to track her academic progress. When Amelia talked about this shared social activity, she pointed out that she and her mother always talked during and after about something they had read on the school website. While they were on the site, Amelia confessed they often checked up on her brother because, as Amelia put it, “my brother doesn’t always tell my mom what’s for homework because he doesn’t always like to record it or know what it is.” Reece also frequented the school’s website with her parents to keep informed about school events and her school progress.

I don’t usually go on with my sisters, but if we are on with our mom and dad, it is usually for something for school, like application or something to see, like if we have a test coming up or to see what homework we have, or the teacher sometimes posts things. Again, much like Amelia and her mother, Reece mentioned that she and her parents often talked about what they read on the school website during their shared reading activity.

Traditional print-based texts. Reading is intertwined in social relations in the context of everyday life. In addition to the varied ways the participants used digital text to sustain and

promote new types of social relationships and interactivity with family and friends, the participants' stories also revealed the social nature of reading when they talked about their various reading activities that centered on their uses of traditional print-based texts. For the participants in this study, reading was meaningful, relevant, and situated in the social networks and relationships that they desired to maintain and nurture. This was very evident when the participants talked about the significant people who had influenced their reading in positive ways. The participants demonstrated the social aspect of reading when they willingly and actively made efforts to seek out and invite the influences of other people in their reading lives.

In Ben's stories of reading, he revealed his mother was a positive role model in his life and that she had been a huge influence on him as a reader. Ben told me that he wanted to be a reader because his mother was an avid reader. His mother also played a pivotal role in his decision to read the first book in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins, and because of his mother's influence, he made the decision to read the rest of the series after he was so mesmerized by the storyline in the first book. Since they both shared an interest in what has been described as dystopian fiction, they decided to read the first book together. "Ya, well, we sort of read the first *Hunger* books together." Every night before bed, notwithstanding unforeseen circumstances, Ben and his mother continued their dystopian adventure together. Ben indicated that although he and his mother engaged in their shared reading activity, a great deal of discussion also took place around the events of what Ben described as a riveting storyline. "It was just like the suspense and not knowing what's always going to happen." Ben mentioned that it was his mother to whom he turned when he wanted to talk about something he read. It was evident that, for Ben, traditional print-based text afforded him opportunities to forge a special connection with his mother and, through their shared activities that centered on their interest in

books, and in particular *The Hunger Games* trilogy, he was able to deepen his relationship with his mother.

Much like Ben's stories of his mother's influence and how he actively invited her to be part of his reading life, Amelia also acknowledged that her mother played a significant role and was an influential person in her life as a reader because her mother took an interest in her reading. This was apparent in the following exchange, where Amelia related how she came to read the *Theodore Boone* series of books by John Grisham.

A: Like my Mom brought me to the *Theodore Boone* series 'cause she showed me it's by John Grisham, that guy.

JW: So how did she know about the series?

A: We were in Chapter's and she found the book.

JW: So she sort of directed you towards the series?

A: Ya.

JW: So she had some influence on you selecting this series?

A: Ya.

JW: Do they tell you what to read or suggest books?

A: They suggest books, and I look at them to see if I like it or not.

Amelia told me her mother often suggested books for her to read, and she also introduced her to new authors. Amelia welcomed her mother's offers, and more often than not, she accepted her suggestion and recommendations.

In one story after another, Amelia revealed how her mother played a significant role in her reading life. Amelia's mother not only encouraged her to read and recommended books that she thought might be of interest to Amelia; her mother often read the same books that she read. It

was obvious that Amelia enjoyed this special relationship with her mother: “It’s good ‘cause I’ll read a book and then she reads it, and then she’d be like, ‘Oh, you should read the rest of them.’” Amelia mentioned that her mother was very in tune with her reading interests because “she kind of knows what I like to read because she reads the books I get as well.” Amelia told me that she often discussed books with her mother because her mother frequently read the same books. The exception, as Amelia pointed out, was “when I read the Greek mythology books, like *Goddess Girls*[by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams]. Then I talk to my brother about it because he knows a lot about that.” Although Amelia’s mother was influential in that she supported her wholeheartedly in her reading pursuits, her brother was influential in another important way. He supported her in that he created an atmosphere for competition, one in which Amelia thrived and readily invested herself. Amelia told me that she often followed her brother’s lead and would often choose to read books because he read them. And because of this competition, they had developed a special sibling connection centered on books. That is how she first learned about one of her favourite book series, *39 Clues*: “My brother reads them, *39 Clues*, so we have a lot of them.” When Amelia described the event, it was clear that she loved and welcomed the challenge to see who would be first to finish the series. The healthy competition her brother fostered and the influence he had on her reading were evident in another story, which is highlighted in the following exchange, when Amelia was asked whether there was anything she wanted to read:

A: Like maybe the Greek mythology, like the *Percy Jackson* series. ‘Cause my brother he reads them.

JW: And what made you want to read the *Percy Jackson* series?

A: Because, my brother, he is always talking about it and I don’t understand it. Then him and my uncle both talk about it, and I still don’t understand it.

The social relationships that developed between Amelia, her brother, and her mother through their shared book activities was also demonstrated when Amelia talked about her family's affinity for reading comics. She said, "Everybody in my family likes them." Amelia and her family were especially passionate about the *Archie* comic books. This passion became apparent when Amelia talked about the boxes of *Archie* comic books that her mother stored in the kitchen. She did this so they could be easily accessed, read, and passed around. In Amelia's household, reading *Archie* comic books became a fun social activity, especially when the family sat around the kitchen table and shared their stories of the quirky antics of their favourite characters. Hearing Amelia so vividly paint this picture of her family all nestled around the kitchen table reading, talking, and laughing about something they had read, one cannot deny that reading was social practice and was embedded in their everyday social lives.

Amelia's story of sustaining friendship connections through reading centered on the Battle of the Books, an interschool competition that involved students reading books and being asked questions about the books they read. For Amelia, the event was memorable, not only because "I felt proud" to be selected, but especially since two of her friends from her school were also selected to be part of the school team. Although this prestigious book reading event enabled Amelia to nurture her social connections with her current friendships, it also gave her an opportunity to connect with old friends. "It was fun 'cause, like, I didn't always go to this school, so I got to see some of my friends from my old school."

Reading as a social practice and as a way to sustain friendships was also apparent in Amelia's story of Christmas gift-buying, which came up in a conversation about a recent school book fair. "Me and a group of friends, we bought books for each other, we like – 'cause there's three of us and two of us would buy a present for somebody for Christmas and then we just store

it in our lockers until Christmas.” The amusing part of the story was how truly socially connected they were, as Amelia revealed: “It turned out that we all got the same books for each other.” Staying connected with her network of friends was important, and Amelia was able to do this in school by reading the books her girlfriends read. Though Amelia originally replied, “Um, not really,” when she was asked about reading magazines, she later clarified her statement and added, “I read them with my friends.” And Reece was one of those friends.

Reece told me that apart from reading her teen magazines with her sisters, where they would often do the quizzes together, she often brought her stack of magazines with her when she visited Amelia. “I usually bring the ones about teen celebrities and stuff.” Similarly, when Amelia visited Reece, they often sat and read magazines about pop culture and stories about their favourite pop stars. Reece pointed out, “Me and Amelia read them together.” They often talked about what they read, not just in the magazines but other books they shared in common. Reece explained this only happened with the two people that she trusted the most, Amelia and her other friend Lisa [pseudonym], because, “they like to read a lot too, and they understand things in kind of in the same way that I do, and we are really good friends.” This connection established through reading and books was important because “we understand each other.” Reece told me how she connected with Amelia:

I like talking to Amelia because we kind of like the same things, like, for reading and because we are really good friends and I feel like I can talk to her and not be embarrassed what I am saying. ‘Cause sometimes with your other friends if you start talking about a book, they won’t think of it as interesting as you do, but Amelia she does, ya.

Trust was an issue with Reece and one she brought up when she talked about how important it was that their discussions remained amongst themselves, because they were personal. Reece

described their conversations in this way: “Like when we talk about books, we don’t really talk about what we read; we talk about it in a different way, like about what we think it could mean.” Reece touched on the power of reading for identity work when she said, “Like, sometimes we compare what’s in the book to our daily lives.” When Reece talked about their conversations that centered on and around the books they read, she revealed how they resonated with her in a way that gave her something to think about in her own life, and they helped her to get to know herself better. This practice also enabled her to connect with her close friends in a deeper and more meaningful way. The social benefits that reading afforded Reece were evident when she described her personal experiences and the special times she shared with her girlfriends.

In a moving story, Reece demonstrated that reading was situated in the social networks and relationships that she desired to maintain: She had second thoughts about her decision to read the book, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, a book that was different from what her friends usually read during silent reading time. Her story is significant because it revealed that one’s choice of text is seen to have social consequences, especially when it is thought to be important not to deviate from the pattern of practice where everyone in her social network of friends knows what each other reads. The reading event in question occurred when Reece brought the book to school for silent reading period. Reece told me she had hoped to keep the book private but soon realized that this was not possible in a public forum: “Um, they kind of asked, like “Oh, Reece, what are you reading?” Reece highlighted how she struggled with how to deal with the perceived social pressure exerted by being different. Reece recalled exactly how it played out:

R: I was kind of embarrassed to be reading that book because [pause]. Ya. And so I kind of didn’t let them see what I was reading. Like I would kind of hide it and then put it down on my desk flat so nobody could see the cover.

JW: Why were you embarrassed?

R: I don't know, because most of the kids in my class were reading different books that were more exciting I guess, and I just kind of thought – ya.

JW: So you were influenced by your friends?

R: Hmm. But then later on I figured that I shouldn't really care what other people think of me as long as I like me, ya.

Reece expressed her predicament in this way:

'Cause like, in there it's, like, all about good deeds that you do and I guess not so much mushy but more like needing to work on that more, like work on doing good deeds or something. After they saw what I was reading – 'cause they realized I never showed them, 'cause usually I do say, "Oh, I like this book and stuff," – but they asked me what I was reading, and once I showed it to them, they just looked at it and read the first page or something and thought that it wasn't so bad of a book.

Reece did not want her friends to see her reading a self-help book, which she described as "kind of a book of, like, a whole bunch of little stories telling you how to be like a nicer person." In her view, "I thought my friends would think I was like all mushy and stuff 'cause sometimes I can be, but not so much, and I thought they wouldn't want to be my friend anymore, but then after I realized that it shouldn't matter what I read." When she was asked to explain what she meant by mushy, she said, "Like all about good deeds that you do and I guess not so much mushy but more like needing to work on that more, like work on doing more good deeds or something." She was concerned about how she would be perceived, because she thought her friends would see her as a weak person, although she rationalized that she was being silly to think this way: "I shouldn't really care what other people think of me as long as I like me." For Reece, it was

important not to be identified as someone who needed improvement, and because she desired these friendships, she was conflicted as to what to do, which her words revealed: “I might think that they might not like me even though I know they will, but I might think at the time they might not like me if I read a book like this.” As she said, “Most of the kids in my class were reading different books that were more exciting I guess.”

As highlighted in our conversation, Reece struggled with her dilemma. She wanted to read the book, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, because it gave her a source of pleasure, but on the other hand, she did not want to be perceived by her friends as being weak. She also revealed that reading this particular book set her apart from her peers, which was not something she particularly wanted. Reece’s story of reading not only revealed that certain text practices are tied to certain attitudes and beliefs and carried with them certain values, but it also revealed the power of conformity. Because it was important for Reece to be liked and to fit in, her choice of text for the public setting of the classroom rested on, and was based on, the friendships she wished to maintain. Although Reece presented as a strong-willed and confident young girl, she took her book home, where she chose to read it in the privacy of her bedroom, in her canopy bed, where she could read and not be judged. Reece highlighted the importance of fitting in when she pointed out that “most people take out the same kind of book.” She said they go “usually to the chapter books, like the thicker ones. That’s where everyone kind of goes in my class.” Reece said all of her friends read the same things, and she identified one such text favoured by her friends: “Like the chapter books that are more like fact.” When asked whether any of her friends read anything outside of what the other group members usually read, meaning her circle of friends, she replied, “No.”

Similar to Reece, Juliet revealed the common social practice where the choice of text was influenced by the friendships she wished to cultivate. She demonstrated this practice when she talked about how she often selected books because her friends in her social network also read the books. Juliet often read the same books all her girlfriends read. “There are these diary books in the library, and I saw everyone reading them [*Dear Dumb Diary*], and I thought if they all like it, maybe I will give it a try.” She recalled one particularly popular book she wanted to read because all her friends were reading the book: “*Hugo*, it’s one really large book. I wanted to read the book, but last year I couldn’t because everyone else was reading it.” Juliet talked about another familiar scenario that illustrated this common social practice: “Sometimes we all want to get one book.” Juliet talked about her interest in pop culture and her and her friends’ shared interest and fascination with the popular British boy band, One Direction. The story unfolded during the school literacy dig, when Juliet proudly showed off her prized possession, a newly released unauthorized biographical book written about the lives of the five band members. Juliet told me that, to be part of her social group, it was important that she had her own copy of the book because when her friends got together they often talked about something they read. “Oh, we do talk about the book, like what chapter we are on and what happened to the person.” When she was asked why they talked about this book and not the other books they read, she responded: “I don’t know, maybe because we all know it and we are all reading it.” Juliet revealed that she, like her friends, was curious about the lives of real people, and because this particular book was about people with whom they were so fascinated, they wanted to share what they read with each other.

In contrast to Juliet and the other participants’ stories of making connections centered on the books they shared, Katrina’s stories of reading in her everyday life were much different. In

conversations about her reading practices, Katrina rarely talked about reading traditional print-based text as a way to provide her with opportunities to cultivate and sustain relationships, at least not in the way that digital text did. However, there was one story that stood out from the rest, which highlighted the social aspect of reading, and that was of a particularly wonderful memory Katrina shared about her grandfather. Katrina was close to her grandfather, and she had a warm and loving relationship with him. She revealed that her grandfather fuelled her interest in the *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* series of books when he took her to a Ripley's museum. She told me she was so intrigued by what she saw at the museum that she was drawn to the books. Because of his influence, Katrina became a huge fan of this series of books, and she took great pleasure in reading about the weird and wonderful anecdotes.

For the participants, reading provided not only opportunities to connect and sustain relationships with family and friends, it also afforded opportunities for communicative purposes and to forge, nurture, and support their shared interests, and facilitate and promote new types of social interactivity. From the varied ways the participants used both digital text and traditional print-based text, they each demonstrated the many reading events that revolved around its uses and exposed the social nature of reading that grew out of their everyday reading practices. In this sense, reading was a social practice deeply embedded in social life and in the context of its use.

From their stories of reading, the participants demonstrated that their everyday reading was meaningful, purposeful and fulfilled functions in their lives. Through their rich and descriptive stories of their reading, the participants demonstrated the multitude of ways they embraced reading each in their own way that was connected to what they wanted to accomplish. Sometimes it afforded them opportunities for imaginative identity-making, or to learn new information; other times, to follow various intellectual engagement pursuits or to be social. It

was clear that for each participant, texts were used for one (or all) of these purposes, and the participants made clear distinctions between them. The myriad uses of both digital and traditional-based texts reflected the varied ways reading was practiced as a situated social activity. As such, reading was personally meaningful, relevant, and embedded in their everyday lives.

Theme Two: Reading has Personal and Private Dimensions

When the five participants interviewed for this study described their experiences of reading in their everyday lives, they revealed the personal and private dimensions of reading. Reading is deeply personal, often private, and highly individual, and the participants exemplified this when they talked about making their own choices about their reading, specifically in relation to the personal decisions they made about the texts they chose to read, the influences of others on their reading, the places in which they read, and with whom they chose to share aspects of their reading lives. For the young people in my study, reading is personal, and this was particularly evident when they shared their views with respect to other people's perceptions of them as readers. What permeated their stories was the importance of choice and the need to be in charge of, and take command of, their reading. By exercising agency in matters that affected their reading, the participants forged their own paths and navigated their own reading lives. Reading as a personal and often private practice in their individual reading pursuits became a central theme in our discussions about their everyday reading practices.

We Make Our Own Choices

When the participants talked about their reading, they expressed the personal aspect of reading when they shared how they each made their own choices as to when and how to fit reading into their busy schedules. In the choices they made, the participants were able to make

their reading their own and to carve out the reading life they desired. Reece put it aptly: “Some kids don’t like to read at all, and some kids like to read more than others.” Ben said, “We will choose when we want to read.” And Katrina said, “We just read when we want to.” Amelia summed up her thoughts in this way: “I have a lot of friends, some are good readers, some are weak readers, but we all like to read.”

From all accounts, reading is an activity that is extremely personal and uniquely individual, and this is evident when the participants stated their views about the importance of reading in their lives. Amelia so eloquently articulated their sentiments, “It is not the most important thing, but it is important.” Amelia told me that reading is only part of her life because “I don’t really have that much time because I am always running around.” Although her time was limited, she made time to read because it was a part of her life. “If I have downtime on the weekend or right after school or something, I will go to the couch and read.” Amelia told me she usually reads for 10 minutes every night, but as far as she was concerned, 10 minutes was inadequate. “I would like a little more time because I will be reading and my parents will come and I will just be getting to a good spot and then I will have to go to bed.” This is why Amelia often resorted to using a reading light, or as she said, “that thing that goes over your head” so that she could read in the dark. When she was asked how she found time to read in her busy life, she replied, “Well sometimes when I am traveling to the events, like for hockey for my games, I can read on the way.” She highlighted this once again when she talked about hockey. “When I am getting ready for hockey, sometimes I have a book in my bag, so I will read it if I am really early.”

Amelia rated reading, “9 or 8.” Out of all the participants, she rated reading the highest. Though the other participants shared Amelia’s sentiments about the relative importance of

reading, they each differed on the degree of importance in their lives. For example, Ben said, “Reading is not a big part of my life, but I do read. It just depends on what it is.” Though Ben stated, “I guess reading is not one of my favorite things to do,” he added, “Reading is pretty important.” Ben indicated that he always made time to read before bed. When he spoke about its significance in his life, he shared this reflection: “My friend’s friend, he’s in grade 8 and he can’t read. I don’t know what I’d do if I was in his situation.”

When Juliet talked about reading and its importance in her life, she articulated, “It is not very important, because I’ve got other things to do like chores.” When she was asked to clarify her comments, being that she had indicated she read often, she offered the following explanation: “Reading is just not that important. It is important, but family is important and everything.” Juliet’s views were not unexpected given that she had household and child care responsibilities. Juliet said, “Sometimes I have to care for my brother and sister.” She indicated that because she was so busy, she could only read “later in the evening after they go to bed.” She said, “I always read a little bit at night.”

Reading was important in Reece’s life although she made her views transparent when she said, “But it depends on what I am reading about, like if I am reading about like *Star Wars* and I don’t really care for it, but if I am reading about horses or something, I like it because I like horses.” Reece was positive about the impact reading has had on her life. She indicated that reading was important because, in her opinion:

It can change your imagination. Like if you are thinking of something to do and then you do it with your friends, it involves, like, imagination; then you can read a book and find ways to make it better, or, like, you can change it and have something different.

When Katrina was asked about the importance of reading in her life, she responded, “Actually very important because I have to read where I am going, like if my Mom is driving me somewhere and she gets distracted by something I would have to look at the signs and read it to her.” Though she deemed reading to be functional, her pre-activity drawing of her weekly schedule revealed she had little time for reading traditional print text. She articulated, “I read whenever I have time. But that is only if I have time for it.” Katrina stressed, “My schedule is pretty important, because if I go off one thing, everything else is off.” In our conversation about her drawing of her typical week, which she colour-coded to show her various activities, Katrina told me that she did not read, because she was too busy with dance. “Out of all my friends I think I am the busiest: I dance five times a week and they dance four times.” When she talked about her dance commitments, she explained that her active life left little time for reading:

I voluntarily read if I had time to do it, but since I don't – I have dance every single day.

I try to read Monday and Wednesday because those are the only two days that I would probably have time to do it. I put it in my schedule because those are the days I would read if I did read.

Though Katrina allotted time to read on Monday and Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m., she related, “I read if I have time,” which, she said, “did not usually happen.” When she was asked whether she read on the weekend given that she did not dance, she replied, “Probably not.” She said, “I'm pretty booked on the weekend.” Based on her pre-interview drawing of her weekly schedule, Katrina filled her time with other activities. She verbalized this when she talked about her schedule. “On Saturday I play with my friends, I do homework and crafts, and watch TV.” Katrina explained that a typical Sunday consisted of the following: “Church, then I play with friends again, watch TV, and crafts, and clean my room.” As is apparent, Katrina's other

preoccupations left her little time to read. Katrina emphasized, “The only reason why I don’t read is because I don’t have the time to do it, ‘cause they [my parents] think I don’t do it because I don’t like to do it.” Though Katrina said, “I’d like to read more,” her comments were somewhat contradictory when she stated, “But reading isn’t my favourite,” and when she pointed out, “I don’t usually read.” Her remarks suggest that she does not place a high priority on reading traditional print-based text. “I like it actually, but I wouldn’t read all the time; I would just read, ‘cause I would sort of get sick of reading if I read all the time.” Her comments also suggested that she appeared to be unsure about her feelings towards reading.

As the participants made visible the importance of reading and the different ways they each chose to fit reading into their lives, they talked at length about the different ways their reading had changed over time. They talked about how they see themselves as having grown as readers. Now that they are 11, they see themselves making more choices about their reading. What is noteworthy here is that instead of reading less often, most of the participants said they read more even though they are confronted with many other distractions. Amelia, for instance, explained that her reading had changed considerably. The most significant change was that she reads for longer periods of time. She articulated this beautifully in her own words: “‘Cause like, when I was younger I would never read a book for two whole days, but I would just read like for 10 to 15 minutes and I would see my brothers doing something and I would go play with them.” Not only had her reading changed in relation to length of time, but it changed in other significant ways. Amelia told me she reads more often: “When I was younger, like, it was less important; like book reading, I wouldn’t do it that often, and I would read less every time I would read.” Amelia pointed out that reading is an important part of her life, and even though she has less time to read because of her organized recreational activities, she reads more compared to when

she was younger, when she had more time. Her reading has also changed in the type of texts she reads as well as the level of difficulty: “The books have got harder, ‘cause the books I am reading now – because if I was in grade 5 or 3, I would not be able to understand them, I don’t think.” And perhaps the most significant way her reading changed was in her freedom to choose: “I make the choices.” Amelia was adamant that she was in charge of her reading. As to how her reading had stayed the same, Amelia, in true fashion, enthusiastically replied, “I still like it!”

Reece echoed Amelia’s sentiment when she discussed her reading. She said, “I still like reading; that hasn’t changed.” Reece pointed out that she probably liked it even more. She explained she liked reading more because “I can understand it” and because “I’m better at it.” Reece discussed why this was so: “I have been able to understand it more, and like, if there is a word in the book that I didn’t know before and I know it now, it makes the reading make more sense.” Reece indicated she started to read more after grade 4. This was a turning point for her, as this is when she realized the benefits of reading. She explained what happened: “I kind of learned that reading can be more entertaining now, because you can actually understand more things in the book and stuff.”

Interestingly, Juliet also revealed that fourth grade was a significant turning point. As Juliet pointed out, “This is when I started to read.” She explained, “I think that is when I really noticed *Archie* comics.” Juliet told me that after she got hooked on *Archie* comics, she started to read books. When she was asked whether she reads more or less than in grade 4, she replied, “More.” She explained her reasons: “Mostly because I can understand more words, and the stories, there were new books coming out and everything.” Juliet mentioned that she liked reading more now because she is a better reader. She mentioned her interests had expanded because there were so many books available from which to choose. Another significant change

was in her choice of text. This change was apparent when she told me she had decided to read *The Hunger Games* although it was a mature book and out of her comfort zone in terms of genre, topic, and size of book. Juliet's reading practices had changed significantly since the fourth grade, and this was especially evident in her quest to challenge herself and in her desire to seek new reading adventures.

Ben was not unlike the others in the sense that he liked to read. However, he differed in the frequency with which he read. "I don't know; I think I used to read lots, I think." When he was asked about his current reading practices, Ben pointed out that although he still enjoyed reading, he read less now than when he was younger. He explained the reason for this: "Because I have more things to do now like sports, like volleyball and basketball." Although he reads less now, his reading remained the same in one significant way. He is still loyal to his favorite genre, which he said is "probably comics mostly."

Of all the participants, Katrina enjoyed reading the least in terms of traditional print-based text. When she talked about her reading compared to when she was younger, she said, "I think I like it less." Not only did she like it less, she read less often. Whenever Katrina talked about her reading, she often expressed that she was too busy to read. "Because I dance more and I do more stuff." When Katrina was asked whether her reading interests have changed over the last few years, she said, "No, not really." She indicated she still enjoyed the same books.

We Know What We Like

When the participants described their experiences of reading in their everyday lives, they related stories that showed how their choice of text was based on their own personal decisions. Each participant based his or her personal decisions on what he or she liked to read, had an interest in reading, or what suited individual personal needs. From all their accounts, the

participants were selective in what they read. They knew what they liked to read, and they knew what they did not like, and they were mindful of what kinds of texts provided them with what they needed and desired. They were not easily swayed by the influences of others or by what was popular, now or in the past. Juliet expressed this when she said, “I like what I like.”

However, when they so chose, and on their own terms, they also welcomed the influences of others when it suited their personal needs. In this sense, the participants were very much in control of and had command of their reading. Though the participants shared similar interests, especially in relation to popular culture, they each had their own criteria, which they used when they selected their texts.

When the participants were asked to talk about what they liked to read, all five identified their traditional print-based text preferences. Not one participant mentioned any digital-based text preferences. However, when the participants talked, during the inquiry process, about their online activities and how they used their digital and electronic devices, many stories of reading were revealed. In their penchant for traditional print-based text, the participants clearly expressed their personal preferences.

Ben’s words resonated loud and clear when he articulated, “The best thing about reading is that you get to choose.” All of the participants articulated that they knew what they liked to read, and they habitually chose texts based on their personal interests. This was in contrast to the familiar scenario in school, where, as Reece described, “the teacher chooses books for us, because she chooses it by reading level.” Reece explained how this routinely played out: “Like she will say, ‘You guys are reading this book and this book,’ and then she asks us to tell her what it is about.” Amelia spoke about this familiar practice in school and explained it in this manner: “We get together in the groups, the highest, lowest, medium, like different groups, different

thicknesses of books, and we read and we write down notes.” In our exchange about the school reading program, Juliet made her opinion known as to what she would have liked:

JW: In your reading group, is there a book that you would rather read?

J: Well, there’s this one – it’s called *Ruby Kingdom* – that somebody else is reading that sounds interesting.

JW: Would you have picked that book if you have had a choice?

J: Ya

JW: Do you get make choices?

J: No, not really.

JW: Would you like to?

J: Ya.

Although Juliet and the others were not in favour of having their teacher choose their reading material, they also did not question this classroom practice, nor did they criticize their teacher, whom they respected and of whom they spoke highly. In subsequent discussions, however, they revealed that it is hard to get excited about reading something when someone else chooses for them. Reading outside of school was different; it was rich and varied and based on their own personal decisions. Amelia highlighted this contrast between choice and non-choice when she talked about how her reading was different outside of school. It was especially transparent when she stressed, “Now that I am 11 years old, I make the choices in the kinds of books I read.”

When Amelia spoke about the books she reads, she always had a sparkle in her eye, a beaming smile, and an energized excitement in her voice. Amelia articulated the sentiments of the others when she said, “I just know that I just want to read what I want to read.” She stressed that she based her reading choices on whether the text had “a good plot.” When Amelia was

asked how important it was to read what her friends were all reading, she responded, “I don’t really read what my girlfriends are reading.” She remarked that “in school and in our groups I do.” When asked how she selected texts she read outside of school, Amelia said, “Most of the stuff has like a catchy title, and then I read the back of the book, and then see that, and then the author – I go for certain authors.” Amelia was particularly attached to the adventure, fantasy, and mystery genres because, she said, “they are kind of suspenseful and you kind of have to think about it.” Amelia was a voracious reader, and she often read several books simultaneously. “I have my library books and then my fun books.” Amelia highlighted the difference between the two: “Well, library books are books that I read that I think I am interested in, but not, like, totally, but my fun books are the ones that I really, really like.” Amelia explained how this worked:

Sometimes I read a bit of library; like if I don’t have much time I just read, like, a few pages of my library because they are smaller than *Theodore*. And when I have more time I read *Theodore* – so I can get into the story.

During the school literacy dig, Amelia showed me a book in her backpack that she was reading, and she shared how she heard about the series. “I discovered *Everest* books [by Gorman Korman] from the Battle of the Books, because I had to read one and I liked it, so I got the next one.” When she was asked to select her favourite from amongst all the books she had recently read, she emphatically stated, “I don’t know, I like them all.”

When Amelia talked about her reading, she explained what the reading experience was like for her in the following quote:

Sometimes I zone out and I can't hear anything but what I am reading, 'cause I will just be so focused on it. Like if my brothers are, like, fighting, I won't hear them sometimes, 'cause I'm like totally focused. Ya, I'm into it [the story].

Amelia described her reading experiences as if feeling totally engaged in an activity where everything disappeared but the pure enjoyment of the activity itself. She explained the experience in this way: "You don't know what's going on around you, just what you are looking at." When she talked about reading, she said the experience was similar to: "Sometimes if I am playing a video game." She explained the comparison in this way:

Sometimes I will be, like, playing or reading and then my mom will be, like, talking to me, and then she notices that I am not paying attention, and she will like take the book or the game away [laughs].

Amelia had a clear sense of what she liked to read, and her choices were based on her own personal decisions. Although her book choices may not have been her own in school, outside of school was different: She lived the reading life she chose, and she clearly took great pleasure in selecting her own reading material.

Likewise, Reece talked about her reading experiences in much the same way as Amelia – that is, as being totally absorbed in the act of reading – and she described it as being similar to a type of flow experience: "If someone was talking to me, I wouldn't notice because I am just reading like nothing can distract me or pull me away." Reece explained this mostly happened at home. In reference to school she said, "It's hard to concentrate because there's more people around you, and at home I can be in my bedroom with the door closed and stuff."

The kinds of books Reece most often gravitated towards were those about how other people lived their lives. She clearly articulated this sentiment in her own words: "I like ones that

are, like, in diary form, or like telling a story about somebody and like telling about their daily lives.” When sharing her favorite series, *Little House on the Prairie*, she explained, “I just kind of like those books.” Reece explained that she had tried to read the series in previous years, but she was not successful. She told me that this year, however, she was going to read the entire series. Reece felt that it was a realistic goal because, as she articulated, “I’m a fast reader.” When Reece was asked to explain why she wanted to read all nine books in the series, she summed up her decision in this way:

Probably because when you read the first one it talks about them going on a trip, and then the second book it tells you what they do and travel on the trip, and like, you want to find out where to, how they got there, how they are going to get there, what they are going to pack to go and stuff.

Reece revealed that reading the *Little House on the Prairie* book series is what eventually led her to read other books in the diary genre. She explained, “*Little House on the Prairie* is a little bit like a diary, like it tells about her life and her family and stuff.” Reece told me that she inherited many books from her older sister and that it was her sister who introduced her to this series. Reece indicated that she regarded her older sister to be a significant person in her reading life, “because most of the books I have are from my sister.”

Reading about people and the way they lived their lives was what she relished the most about the texts she chose, and this was what enticed her to read *Dear Canada*, a collection of books by a number of Canadian children’s authors. She summed up the series as being “about people’s experiences.” She explained that “it’s not really a series, but there are lots of books in there, like *Dear Canada*, and they are all, like, about – it’s like a diary of a different girl in each

book.” She described her first encounter with the series, when she was so enamored by the story that she could not put it down:

I got this book last year, it was a *Dear Canada*, and I liked it and I didn’t want to close my book, it would just like end and everything, so I got it again this year and I really liked it again.

When Reece talked about this series, she said she enjoyed the books so much that she often re-read some of her favourites. This was a common practice for her. Reece pointed out, “I re-read a lot of books actually.” She offered two reasons why she did so: “I like them a lot,” and, “Sometimes when I get to the end I forget what happened in the beginning, so I just read it again.” Reece often re-read books she found interesting, especially stories about other people’s lives. Such was the case with one particular book in the *Dear Canada* series, about the polio epidemic, entitled, *To Stand on My Own: The Polio Epidemic Diary of Noreen Robertson* by Barbara Haworth-Attard. She explained why she was so drawn to this book:

I don’t know. It was just the first time I read it, I really got into it, and I just liked it, so I read it again, and I liked it just as much as I liked it the first time.

She stated, “I didn’t want to stop reading it.” Reece recalled one other occasion when she decided to re-read a story: “I got this book, it was *Dear Canada*, and I liked it, and I didn’t want to close my book because it would, like, end everything, and so I got it again this year, and I really liked it again.” Reece was so captivated by the book, she said, “It’s my third time reading it.”

Reece mentioned her fondness for the diary genre was what motivated her to read the *Dork Diaries*, a series by Rachel Renee Russell about daily life in and out of school for 14-year old Nikki Maxwell. Reece also expressed that popularity was the reason she was drawn to the

series. “I just saw everybody else reading them, and then my older sister Jane [pseudonym] read them, and she let me read them, and I liked them.” Reece expressed that she often selected books based on popularity and based on what she observed her friends reading. Reece related that she found the series particularly satisfying to read because “it is not boring and predictable like other books I have read.” Her reasoning behind her decision was, “Because it’s someone’s life you can’t always guess what’s going to happen.” Reece told me that this is what intrigued her most about reading the diary genre: “Life is unpredictable and you never know what is going to happen next.” Reece had definite preferences in her choice of reading material and she typically chose texts that told stories about people’s lives.

When Juliet was asked about the kinds of text she preferred to read, she was explicit about her choices. She articulated, “I like to stick with what I know is good.” She expressed, “If I think it is good I will try it, and if I don’t, I won’t read it.” She indicated she also selected texts based on what was popular and what she observed her friends were reading. When Juliet was asked what motivated her to read, she said, “It’s the stories.” Juliet loved to read stories about other people, both fictional and true stories, and was also captivated by the stories of other people’s lives. When she was asked to elaborate on her text preferences, she offered, “I like comics and diary books.” As far as she was concerned, one text she knew was always good was *Archie* comics. In our exchange about *Archie* comics, Juliet revealed, “I read a lot of them.” The time Juliet discovered *Archie* comics was especially memorable, and she described it in this way:

Well I always kind of liked them, [*Archie* comics] but in grade 4 I really liked them, and she [Mrs. B] had a bucket at the back with different books, and there was a bucket of *Archie* comics.

Juliet enjoyed reading *Archie* comics and placed a high value on their importance. She told me her mother often went to the local thrift store, where she often picked up more comics for her to read. On one occasion, when Juliet was asked what she would buy if she had endless amounts of money to spend, she replied, “*Archie* comics.” When the discussion turned to the costly price of a single issue, Julie was emphatic about its significance in her life. She responded, “I think they are worth it.”

In keeping with her motto of sticking with the books she knew were good, Juliet embraced the *Dear Dumb Diary* books, a popular series of books about a junior high girl who, she explained, “has got some crazy ideas.” When Juliet was asked how many books she had already read in the series, she proudly responded, “All the ones in the library.” She said, “If I have a book, I will read it until I am finished.” Juliet started the popular *Dear Canada*, a series of historical novels by different authors, because “everybody else started to read them.” Her fondness for the diary genre is what eventually led her to the *Dork Diaries* series. Just like Reece, Juliet indicated she re-read books when she knew they were good. These girls know what they like, and they often re-read books they enjoyed. Her motivation to re-read books was simple and straightforward: “If it is a really good book and it is a series, I just want to read it over again.” She proudly stated that the most she had ever read a book was four times: “I read *Dork Diaries* four times and *Wimpy Kid* three times.” She also highlighted this practice during the school literacy dig, when she showed me the book *One Direction*, about her favorite band. When Juliet talked about the book, she said she planned to read it many times and explained why: “I’ll put it down for a while and then I’ll pick it up again ‘cause I might forget some things.”

Juliet selected other texts based on what she knew was good. She related that she was intrigued by the *Guinness World Records* [published by Jim Pattison Group in London, UK] and

the *Ripley's Believe It or Not* series of books [developed and produced by Miles Kelly Publishing Ltd.]. In keeping with her mantra of reading books she knew would be good, Juliet decided to read *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins. And she made this decision despite the fact that “I don’t really like reading big heavy books.” Interestingly, Juliet told me she made an exception when she decided she wanted to read *The Hunger Games* trilogy after she watched the movie. Juliet related how the story brought forth a great deal of emotion for her and how “it makes you jump and it makes you cry.” She said, “I cried when the little girl my age died.” When she was asked about her change of heart, she told me she was looking forward to the challenge of reading her first mature book even though she described the book as being “big and thick.” What was most interesting is that this was the first book Juliet decided to read that none of her friends were reading. Juliet had a definite sense of what she liked in her choice of text, and she typically preferred to read texts that she knew were good. There is no doubt that Juliet was a reader and that she enjoyed reading. Interestingly, both her teachers did not perceive Juliet to be an avid reader.

Much like the other participants, choice was important for Ben, and he had a clear sense of what he liked to read. In contrast to Juliet, Reece, and Amelia, Ben never talked about reading in the ways the girls talked about reading, as being consumed by reading and the pleasures it afforded them. Ben stressed that the best thing about reading was choice. He explained, “That it’s not something you have to do, but it’s something that’s fun to do.” In Ben’s words, “Reading is usually fun, I think, unless you are, like, reading a really boring book.” When the conversation turned to why he reads, he at first could not articulate why. Instead he responded, “I don’t know, it’s not something I ever really thought about.” Though Ben could not articulate what he gained from reading, which was somewhat surprising, he was able to articulate the difference between

reading in and out of school. Ben clearly expressed: “Reading at school is different than what I read at home.” When Ben was asked whether he reads what his friends read, he clearly articulated, “No, not usually.” He did not base his decision on what his friends were reading. Instead he said, “I sort of take out books from the same place ‘cause they are kind of like what I like.” Ben relied on his own steadfast strategy for selecting books. He explained that he first browsed through the book and then he based his decision on the contents of the book: “I probably read the first few pages. That’s what I do with a lot of books. I read the first several pages and say, ‘No, this isn’t good.’”

In our discussions about the types of texts that gave him pleasure, Ben said, “I mostly read the same kind of books.” He mentioned he usually gravitated towards texts that were from the humor, informational, or adventure genres, with lots of “fighting and action.” One particular adventure series that appealed to him was the hugely popular series *The Hunger Games*, a trilogy by Suzanne Collins. In our discussion about the series, Ben recounted how he was drawn to the series after his friend told him how much he liked the movie. Ben commented that the decision to read the first book in the trilogy was not his initially his own: “I wanted to see the movie when it came out in the theatre, but my mom told me that I had to read the book first because it was always better.” When he was asked whether it was a common practice, Ben replied, “No.” He told me the reason was probably “because I think I wanted to see the movie, and I don’t think I wanted to use my money for some reason.” Ben mentioned that since his experience with the first book was so positive, he made the decision on his own to read the second and third books in the series. He also rationalized, “I think it is weird to read one book and not read the other books.” When he was asked to explain what he liked about the books, he replied, “I just like the suspense and not knowing what’s always going to happen.” When Ben talked about other texts

that appealed to him, unlike several other participants in the study, he said he was not an *Archie* comic fan. He leaned more towards two other popular comic strips, *Garfield*, by Jim Davis, and *Calvin and Hobbes*, by Bill Watterson, which, he said, “were funny.” He later cited these two comics as his favourites because, in his opinion, “they were [a] clever kind of humor.” He told me he enjoyed clever humor because it made him think about things and he found this to be personally satisfying.

In his practice of sticking with the “same kind of books,” Ben told me he often selected graphic novels because “I like the story.” He also found the coloured graphics appealing to him visually. Ben cited *Missile Mouse*, by Jake Parker, and *Cardboard*, by Doug Tennapel, as two graphic novels to which he was mainly drawn. Ben recounted the time when he first discovered them in the school library. “I just saw it and I thought it looked kind of cool, the picture.” Besides graphic novels, Ben was also committed to the non-fiction genre of informational books like *Ripley’s Believe It or Not* and the *Guinness World Records*, two books which were also popular with the other participants. Ben explained what he liked about the former: “I like *Ripley’s* because they are about odd things that aren’t real but seem real, like how real some of the fake things are.” When asked about his thoughts on the latter, Ben responded, “I am interested to read about some of the odd things people do, like kicks in the face, like 62 times in a minute.” He told me he would not likely want to do something that crazy just to get into the record book. Although Ben said he had no desire to read “books based on things that have actually happened,” he told me this did not include informational books, like the *Guinness World Record Book*, and he pointed out, “I don’t really find history very interesting, so I don’t like to read about things like the Titanic.” He stated that he did not like reading about history and steered away from “books about war” because, “we talk about it lots in social.” Ben was certain

in his choice of texts and he typically preferred to read texts that captivated his attention. Though he had difficulty articulating why he reads, he certainly made it known that choice was important to him and that his reading choices outside of school were different.

In contrast to the others, Katrina told me that she was not committed to any particular type of text in deciding on her choices of text to read. She based her decision strictly on whether the book cover was interesting. She explained that she usually checked the cover and read the contents on the back, and if it interested her, then she chose the book. Katrina's stories of her reading experiences were very different than all of the other participants. She talked about how she often went off topic when she read: "Like when I am in my room and, like, everything is quiet, I can't stay on topic because I'm thinking about something else, but I have to read the book or something." Katrina mentioned that she often forgets to read and that she has to re-start books because she forgets what they are about. When she talked about her reading experiences, she often talked about her struggles. She explained her reading in this way: "I can read by myself, but when I have to read out loud I usually get past the first sentence, and then I kind of stutter and get stuck on words like *or* and *us* or something." Katrina's lack of confidence as a reader was revealed in the following quote, where she talked about her experience of reading at school.

'Cause I'm in a reading group and we usually read out loud so that, like, we read them to the rest of the group, and they read a page and then that's how I know, because sometimes I usually stutter a lot.

When Katrina was asked to comment on her reading preferences, she responded, "I like all the books I read the same." In a subsequent interview, when she was asked again to comment on something she read that she found was wonderful, she replied, "Anything I am reading now."

When the conversation turned to what Katrina was currently reading, she mentioned *Geronimo Stilton*, a chapter book about a talking mouse who works as a journalist for a newspaper. This book is part of a large collection of books in a popular adventure series by Elisabetta Dami. Katrina told me, “There’s 40-something books, and I’ve read seven.” When she was asked what she liked about the series, she responded, “I like it because they go different places, and so it’s not all in the exact same place, and there’s not the same character in every book.”

In our discussion of other texts Katrina chose to read, she mentioned that she had a fondness for the *Guinness World Records* books because “they are just good books.” She explained, “I just sign them out and read them for a week.” She was quite pleased with herself when she expressed, “I have read every one and right now I am reading 2011.” Katrina stumbled upon the *Guinness World Records* in the school library when “the other books were too hard, ‘cause I couldn’t read the chapter books then ‘cause I wasn’t a very good reader.” She told me she eventually embraced the series because “they were pretty cool.” It was evident that Katrina had a penchant for the informational genre when she cited another that she particularly enjoyed; the *Ripley’s Believe It or Not* books. When asked what enticed her to read this book series, she said, “Because it has different things you would not see in other books.” Clearly this genre of books fulfilled Katrina’s needs, as her comments suggested: “Ya, I really like *Ripley’s* and *Guinness World Records* and stuff because it’s something that if I don’t feel like reading a lot, I read that because it has pictures and words and stuff.” When we discussed the merits of shorter text and visuals, Katrina mentioned that she was drawn to them because they grabbed her attention. She explained how the visuals were helpful in conjunction with the print: “They are actually really amazing ‘cause just seeing the picture just doesn’t always give you all the information, so then when you read it, it gives you more detail.” When she talked about the

strategy she used when she read these books, she explained, “I go from the beginning to the end, and just read through the entire book.” Although Katrina talked about the pleasure she gained from reading the series of informational books, she ended her sentence in the above cited quote with, “But I usually don’t read.”

Katrina talked about another book series she spotted in the school library, *Kidnapped*, a series of three books by Gordon Korman. When she was asked what attracted her to this series, she described what she liked about it: “It’s a chapter book about that thick and that big. I liked it because it has lots of characters and they are mostly main characters, and it didn’t go off topic or anything.” Katrina told me the reason she decided to read a book by Gordon Korman was simply because “I wanted to try something different.” She considered a good read to be one that captured her attention right away, and this particular text, like the previously highlighted texts, measured up to her expectations.

Although Katrina expressed that she was not committed to a specific genre or type of text, her collective stories revealed that Katrina had definite text preferences. Unlike the other participants, Katrina struggled with reading, and this struggle was reflected in the stories she told about her reading experiences. When she chose to read, however, she had one basic criterion: “It just started off right at the beginning with the story, and it didn’t have a bunch of extra stuff just to fill it in.” If the text failed to capture Katrina’s attention immediately, she was simply not interested.

Discerning tastes for texts. When the participants spoke about their print-based text preferences, they also made it known what they had no desire to read. The two examples that are highlighted were selected to illustrate that young people today read what they have an interest in, not because something might have once been popular. Except for Reece, the participants did not

put magazines on their priority list of text preferences, and they indicated that they rarely purchased them. This is somewhat surprising given that a number of studies (included in the literature review) of students' text preferences often cited magazines as being popular with young people (Hopper, 2005; Kelly, 2010; Krashen, 2004). In contrast to the other participants, Reece told me she had many teen magazines: "Like teen magazines about, like, all the pop stars." She said, "My mom, she buys me a lot of magazines." When asked why she reads them, Reece explained, "Because they have little quizzes in them." Reece was also interested in and wanted to know about "all the famous teenagers and stuff." Though Reece enjoyed reading teen magazines, she said she was different from other girls her age because "usually girls my age, they don't read a lot of magazines." Katrina shared a similar sentiment that teen magazines were just not popular with her age group: "The last magazine I got was like two years ago." Reece considered that their unpopularity could be for the reason that "people just read them once and they forget about them, and they just don't use them anymore, so some might think it is a waste of money." Reece and Katrina both speculated that young people their age might access the Internet to read about their favorite pop stars rather than buying expensive magazines. In contrast to Reece, who saw the value of buying magazines, Juliet did not. As far as she was concerned, teen magazines were too expensive, and in her opinion, "magazines are mostly lies." Ben had little use for any type of magazine apart from their usefulness for art projects: "There are lots of magazines in the school, but we use them for cutting out pictures and stuff for collages and that sort of stuff." Ben might not be too keen on magazines simply because there are not many magazines for boys his age. Katrina used them in a similar fashion as Ben: "I, like, cut out the pictures and try to glue them onto my iPod."

In addition to magazines, the participants also had strong opinions about other traditional print-based texts they had no desire to read. A number of participants shared how they had no desire to read the widely popular *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling. According to them, seeing the movie was not always the motivation to read the book. Although I found this to be surprising considering the series' worldwide appeal, it does show that young people want to make their own decisions and have clear choices in what they read. The topic of *Harry Potter* was brought up with the other participants subsequent to a conversation with Ben where he talked about what he was not interested in reading. Without much hesitation, Ben replied, "*Harry Potter*." When asked why the book series had not appealed to him, he responded, "I don't think I'll ever read it. I didn't really like it. I've seen all the movies, and I never really liked them that much." Ben shared that he could not be swayed to read the series even by his cousin, who was a huge fan of the series. "Every time we go there, she was always talking about *Harry Potter*." Ben told me he found the plot confusing and explained why: "I just don't understand the Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." This is the fictional school that the characters Harry Potter, Ron, and Hermione attended. Reece echoed Ben's disinterest in the series and shared her view. "*Harry Potter* just doesn't interest me that much. Like I've heard about it, and we have the movies, and I never cared any to read it or watch it I guess." When asked whether she might try reading it in the future, Reece confirmed her disinterest: "No, not really." Amelia agreed with the others in her statement, "I just don't want to read it." She added that the series was not popular with her age group, and other than her brother, she did not know of anyone who was reading the series. When I asked Amelia why she thought it was not popular with her friends, she provided this explanation: "No, 'cause we've already seen the movies. My mom said the books are better than the movies, but I don't really have time to read them because I am reading the *39 Clues*."

Amelia's time was at a premium, and given that she had her own set text preferences, she would not likely be persuaded to read the series. She commented that, for her, seeing the movie usually spoiled the pleasure of reading the book because, "it will be, like, you know, most of it and a few changes in it." Even though the series and subsequent movies became a media sensation that resulted in an unprecedented fan base with young and old readers, for Amelia, Reece, and Ben, this popularity had no bearing on their decision not to read the *Harry Potter* series of books.

Readers sometimes resist the influences of others. When the participants talked about their reading lives, their stories revealed how, in their quest to choose texts based on their own personal decisions, they sometimes resisted the influences of other people. The common thread that weaved throughout the stories was *choice*. Young people want to make their own decisions about what they read, and they did not want to read something that they had no interest in reading. From all accounts, it was the one aspect of their private lives over which they had some control. As their stories demonstrated, no one can make you read something you don't want to read, at least not outside of school.

When Katrina spoke about her mother's influence on her reading, she said, "My mom influenced me on trying to get me to read more." When asked in what ways, she stated, "She just said I should read more and to make some time for reading." Katrina told me her mom wanted her to read "chapter books." Although her mother recommended books, Katrina said she did not read them. "Ya, but some of her books that she recommends for me are like that thick that she has already read and stuff." She went on to say: "She has a lot of books on her bookshelf and some of them are good, like I would like to read, but I just usually look at it, and sometimes I just play around with the books."

In the following exchange Katrina, demonstrated that she would not be easily influenced to read something that she had little desire or interest in reading despite her mother and also her aunt's good intentions:

JW: You said your Mom sometimes suggests books. Tell me about that?

K: I think the last time it was the books that my aunt gave me. I think it was the one that she suggested out of that bunch.

JW: Oh, yes, you said it was *The Hardy Boys*?

K: Ya, that one. Cause she gave me this whole bunch of books and it was like a huge box of books that was in there.

JW: Were these your aunt's favorites when she was little?

K: Ya,

JW: So tell me what happened?

K: My Mom saw it on the shelf and she suggested that I read some.

JW: Was there anything in the box you liked?

K: Not really.

When Katrina spoke about her aunt's influences on her reading and the books she had inherited from her, she said, "I tried reading them in grade 4, but I just didn't like them." The following is a part of a lengthy conversation about her aunt's good intentions. It is also an example in which Katrina asserted her agency and resisted her aunt's invitation to read one of her favorite books from her youth.

K: Sometimes she gives me books from her childhood, and she gave me one of the *Hardy Boys* or something.

JW: I've read those. Did you read them?

K: I read the first book, and I didn't read the second book. It didn't appeal to me.

Though Katrina attempted to read one of the books in the collection her aunt sent her, she based her decision not to read them on her personal preferences, and these books were definitely not to her liking.

In a similar scenario, Juliet shared a story of her grandfather's grand gesture of sending her books to read. In the excerpt below, Juliet showed how she exerted her agency when she demonstrated that she would decide what she reads:

JW: You said some of the books on your bookshelf are gifts. What books are those?

J: One was, it's about a ballerina, ya.

JW: Who bought you that book?

J: My grandfather in B.C.

JW: Are you interested in ballet?

J: No

JW: Or about a girl who is a ballerina?

J: I haven't read it yet.

JW: When did you get it?

J: For my 10th birthday.

JW: And you are 11 now.

Juliet recalled a similar scenario that happened with her mother. Once again, Juliet clearly demonstrated her choice of text was based on her own personal decisions, and this example highlighted this concept accurately:

JW: You were saying that your mom suggests books for you to read?

J: Yes, there was this older book she suggested that I read, but I never did.

JW: Do you remember which book it was?

J: It was one she found at the thrift store, and she thought it would be nice, and I didn't really find it interesting, and so I didn't read it.

Time and again, this similar scenario played out, where the participants declined the good intentions of others and honoured their own choices instead. For example, Reece mentioned that her mother often suggested books for her to read. However, although her mother suggested books, it was evident that Reece made her own decision about her reading. In the following exchange Reece revealed that although her mother's intentions were good, her influence was minimal:

R: Well, sometimes if she reads a book that would be appropriate for me, then she would say, "Oh, ya, you should try reading this book." But I never really read them [laughs].

JW: Can you think of a time?

R: Sometimes she recommends them from when she was little and she read them.

JW: Have you read any of these books?

R: No [laughs].

This story of reading was quite comical and was so typical of Reece, who knew exactly what she liked and what she did not like, and she was not about to be easily influenced by others' suggestions.

The next exchange is another example that illustrates that readers want to read material that is meaningful to their lives. Here Amelia demonstrated that she would not be easily influenced to read something that she had little desire to read.

JW: Your mom mentioned that Nancy Drew was your hero, yet you never mentioned it.

Have you read any of the books?

A: Um, not yet, but like I know some of the stories.

JW: Was this a series your mom read when she was young?

A: Ya, I think so.

JW: She said she was your hero. Is she?

A: Yes, 'cause she is not afraid of anything and she does detective work and solves mysteries.

JW: Are there any new *Nancy Drew* books?

A: I don't think so.

JW: So it's an old series. They would be interesting to read. So you said you would?

A: Ya, my mom has them; I just need to open them.

Amelia's final remark of the exchange was revealing: "I just need to open them" suggests that she may not be that interested in reading *Nancy Drew* books.

Ben's stories were not as explicit as the girls' stories of resisting the influences of others. However, Ben shared one story in which his sense of agency was transparent. The incident occurred during the home literacy dig, when Ben reluctantly brought out his Bible on his mother's insistence when I asked him to show me what he reads at home. Although he showed me the book, he never indicated he read it, even when his mother said, "It is an important book in our house." When I asked Ben in a follow-up interview, back in the school setting, about reading his Bible at home, he was non-committal and vague. Perhaps Ben passively resisted his mother's influence, but he did not want to speak contrary to his mother because he knew that I knew of the significance she had placed on Bible reading in the home.

We Don't Care What Other People Think

When the participants were asked to respond to what they thought about how other people perceived them as readers, they indicated they did not care about what other people expected them to be. Again, their strong sense of agency came through. Reece, for one, said, “I like reading and I don't care if other people know that I read. It doesn't matter to me.” And she added, “I don't think it's that important, but as long as I am happy with how I read and what I read, I don't think it should matter what other people think.” Ben summed up his thoughts in this way: “It does not matter really. I don't care what other people think.” And, this included his parents and his teachers. This same sentiment was reiterated by both Katrina and Juliet. Amelia's view, on the other hand, differed. Although she paid little attention to the opinions of others about her reading choices, she expressed that she liked to be perceived as a reader.

When the participants were asked to share their thoughts about reading and what they wanted people to know, they did not miss the opportunity for their voices to be heard. Their sentiments revealed that reading for young people today, at least this group of five, is deeply personal and individual. Katrina, for one, did not hold back: “Well I just want them [people] to know that kids don't usually read, they just read when they want to. Like they don't have to read when they don't want to.” She also made it clear that she made her own decisions about her reading choices. Juliet expressed much the same sentiment: “I just know that I just want to read what I want to read.” In our exchange about her reading and what is important to her, Juliet noted, “We all have our own interests I guess.” As far as Juliet was concerned, “I like what I like, and sometimes I read a lot and sometimes I read less.” She stressed that although she may read less at times, it does not mean she liked reading any less. Ben's position was certainly no different: “We will choose when we want to read and what we want to read.” Amelia and Reece

took more of a broader view of what was important to young readers today and highlighted the multidimensional nature of reading. Reece's comments were particularly insightful: "Well, I want them [people] to know that even if they don't think they [kids] are learning from reading and it may not seem like they are learning, they are."

When the conversation turned to the prevailing rhetoric that young people today don't read, they were just as vocal. Amelia shared her personal thoughts: "I have a lot of friends, some are good readers, some are weak readers, but we all like to read." Based on her observations, Amelia believed that young people today like to read a variety of genres and, like her, have their own likes and dislikes. Likewise, Reece stressed the same sentiment and added, "Some kids in grade 6 don't like to read, some kids don't like to read at all, and some kids like to read more than others." Reece offered her take on the situation: "Mostly the girls are reading more." When she was asked to elaborate, she explained herself: "Like, boys are reading, just not as much." When Amelia talked about the importance of reading, she also addressed reading and gender. "Not many of the boys are really readers. They're not really the huge reading type." When she was asked how she knew this, she responded, "Well, most of them are in the lower groups and they don't really enjoy reading that often." Amelia added, "And when they are asked to read in class, they don't; they're like, 'No,' or they don't even do it." Reece offered her insights on the topic of boys and reading: "I think that some of them [boys] try to be, like, cool, I guess, whatever, and I guess reading is cool to some people but not everyone." What Amelia and Reece implied in their discussion of boys and reading is the way things are not always as they appear. And this is especially so in relation to people's perceptions of readers. Interestingly, other than Amelia's language arts teacher, their own teachers did not perceive them to be avid readers either.

“I Like the Feel of the Pages”

From the participants’ vivid portrayals of their reading lives, it was unmistakably apparent that their reading choices were based on personal decisions. As interesting and revealing as all their stories were, perhaps the most unexpected surprise, given my preconceived notion about *digital natives* and their penchant for all things technological, was the participants’ personal preference for traditional print-based text over digital text. The scenario played out when the participants were specifically asked whether they had ever used an e-reader. As the participants demonstrated through their stories, technology was not always the best option.

“Technology is fun to play with and good to read, but sometimes you just want the book,” said Amelia, but Amelia was not the only participant to have a strong opinion on the merits of the traditional print-based text over the digital text, especially in relation to experiences with e-book texts or e-readers. When Amelia was asked for her opinion on the pros and cons, she expressed her preference for the printed book over the electronic version: “I like to hold it. It just makes me feel better, kind of,” and, “Like, I like the feel of the pages, and some books have a smell.” Amelia highlighted other favourable features of books. “I like the idea of turning the page,” and “you can flip ahead a lot of pages without losing your place.” Taking a different slant, Amelia described one scenario when the print-based book she had been reading had advantages over the e-book:

‘Cause like, in *39 Clues*, in the books, I keep finding misprints, like they are all, like, on the bottom where the page number would be, ‘cause like in *Book 8* it has, like, a bunch of symbols or like random numbers and things, and if that was on an e-book, it would not be there.

In another example Amelia clearly expressed her frustrations with e-books.

I wanted to get *The Dead* series, but I can't get it because we only have it on e-book. And so it's like for technology, and I want it in a book, like an actual book, but you can't get the book.

Without a doubt, Amelia clearly demonstrated that she was highly invested in the traditional print-based book format.

Katrina voiced similar comments about the merits of the traditional book format. "I like having a book, because I like feeling it." She offered her own take on its temptation. "It just appeals to be more because it has a lot more stuff in it. Like the pictures and stuff and you can actually flip the pages." The traditional book format appealed to Katrina because it was important for her to get a sense of the book before she decided to read it. "I like reading, like, the back first so I can figure out what the book is about, instead of just buying the book and then having to see it to see what's it's about." She also mentioned she liked to use a bookmark because it was important "to know where I left off." When Juliet discussed the merits of the traditional text versus digital text, she expressed that she preferred the traditional text mainly because of the frustrations she experienced with technology: "You don't have to wait for anything to load or freeze." Although Juliet had no experience with a tablet or an e-reader, she often downloaded information from the Internet on her home computer. On the topic of book versus digital text, Ben was straightforward: "I like the book better," although when he was asked to elaborate he remarked, "I don't know why really." Ben, however, had something tangible to say about the downside of print-based books: "Usually when you buy a real book, its prices are different wherever you go."

Somewhat unexpected, not only of Ben but of the other participants as well, was when they talked about the use of digital mobile devices for reading. Ben was not the only one that

offered mixed reviews. Although Ben stated, “I’ve never really read much on an e-reader,” he said he tried his mother’s Kobo and he was not thrilled with the experience. The issue for Ben seemed to be size. When he talked about the iPod touch and the e-reader, for example, Ben’s opinion was clear: “My iPod touch, it’s too small, but then on my mom’s e-reader it’s too big. So ya, I think it would be more of a size thing.” Ben also pointed out that speed was an issue: “I think, like, there’s probably, like, only a certain speed that you can flip the page, so you can’t just leaf right through.” He mentioned that he was frustrated particularly on the occasions when he wanted to go back in the chapter quickly to discuss an interesting part. Amelia also had an issue with speed, but her frustration involved downloading reading material on her iPad. “It takes time to download, lots of time to download it and the pages, so it could be a blank page, and it has to download that.” Katrina was just as upfront about the shortcomings of using digital devices for reading. She told me she tried using her mom’s e-reader but did not like it: “I used it a couple of years ago, and I started reading a book, but then I really didn’t like it because reading an actual book is better than reading an e-reader.” When she was asked what she did not like about the e-reader, she had this to say: “It was just too blurry, because the pages were like this creamy dark colour, and the black was kind of a grayish, so it was hard to read, and it just got jumbled up in my head.” Katrina stressed the background colour was distracting, which made it “hard to read.” “The background is kind of creamy whereas in a book it is black on white.” This was such a huge irritant that when she was asked whether she would give the e-reader another try, she replied, “Probably not.” Katrina mentioned that even though her friend was keen on her e-reader, she was not interested. “Just because my friend likes it doesn’t mean that I should like it.” Although Katrina owned several mobile devices, she was not swayed by the features of the e-reader or by her friend.

In contrast to the others, Reece and Amelia both highlighted positive aspects of using their digital mobile devices for reading. Both girls used the word *cool*, meaning that it was regarded as socially desirable. Amelia mentioned her family had recently bought the latest iPad tablet, and she was excited to learn to use it. In an interview from the time before she had tried it, she had this to say: “Well, it’s going to be different because I always hold my books a certain way and flip them, so holding the iPad, it’s going to be different.” And on another occasion she said, “Well, it’s going to be different; you can’t fold the iPad for spots, and you can’t just put it down any random place beside your bed or something.” On the matter of the device being shared, Amelia pointed out, “Ya, you have to return it all the way downstairs.” Although Amelia had some reservations initially about the iPad, once she experimented with it, she was much more enthusiastic about the differences and saw the interactive possibilities:

Well I like it because you can get more books on it. But it’s kind of different ‘cause, like, I was reading the *National Geographic*, and there’s a video in it, so you can actually do some videos on something, so you can see, you can learn more about it. You just press it and play it.

Amelia pointed out one other difference she liked about the tablet and how easily books were accessed: “You don’t have to go to a bookstore and then get it.” Based on Amelia’s overall assessment of the iPad, “It’s pretty cool, because you can’t do that [access books instantly] in a book.”

Reece echoed Amelia’s sentiment about the coolness factor associated with digital reading devices, especially when she talked about using her mother’s tablet, a Kindle Fire. Reece was initially drawn to the device because of a feature that appealed to her. She said she liked “the pages.” She explained, “Sometimes, like when I get out of the shower, I like to read, and then my

hands feel weird on paper after a shower 'cause they are wet, so that is when I like to use the Kindle.” Reece was also intrigued with other features: “That you can change the size of the letters and stuff, and you didn’t have to turn the pages, and when I read it, I just tapped it.”

From their descriptive stories, both Reece and Amelia took pleasure in the affordances of their digital devices for reading, and although they were initially enticed by their appeal, only Reece indicated she planned to use the Kindle for reading in the future. Amelia mentioned that the iPad had lost some of its initial appeal. When she was asked what changed her mind, she offered a number of reasons: “I didn’t use it that often anymore because I got into my sports, so I have less time to play it, and then I had tests, so I was studying hard every spare minute, and then my brother plays it a lot too.” And then in the summer, “I am going to camp and I have cousins coming, my grandpa too.” When she was pressed to elaborate further, Amelia stated that she was still a big fan of the traditional print-based book format. She summed up her opinion on the iPad in this way: “It’s pretty cool, but I still like the feel of the book.”

Reading is Often a Private Affair

When the participants talked about themselves as readers, they revealed that even though their reading was very social, the participants saw themselves as making decisions to keep portions of their reading private. By asserting their personal sense of agency, the participants were able to maintain ownership of their reading, and in this way, they were able to keep aspects of their reading lives private when and if they so desired. From all accounts, it was a part of their lives they protected and guarded from others, and about which they were selective, and this included their friends, siblings, parents, and teachers. This need for privacy was in relation to the places they read and in their relationships with significant people in their lives.

The participants in the study want their privacy, and they have established their boundaries for their reading in relation to whom they invite into their reading lives. Most of the participants indicated they rarely, if ever, talked with their friends about what they read. There were a few exceptions, and Reece was one of them. Reece indicated that she “sometimes” talked to her friends about her reading. She was, however, very selective with whom she shared that aspect of her life. She said it depended on a number of factors, such as whether she perceived the friend as being a reader, whether the friend could be trusted, or if they shared similar reading interests. She pointed out, “It depends on the friend,” and, “Whether the friend reads or not.” Reece identified two friends with whom she talked about her reading, and she explained her reasons: “Because they like to read a lot too and they understand things kind of in the same way I do and we are just really good friends.” Reece mentioned she talked to her one friend “because she likes reading a lot and I like reading.” About Amelia, her other friend, she said, “Because we kind of like the same things for reading,” and, “Cause sometimes with your other friends if you start talking about a book, they won’t think of it as interesting as you do, but with Amelia she does, ya.” Reece also raised the issue of trust as a factor in her decision to involve her friends in discussions about her reading. She explained why this mattered: “I think it is important to have someone you can trust because then you can feel like yourself around someone. They have always been there for me. I feel like I can talk to her and not be embarrassed.”

When Amelia was asked whether she talked to her friends about her reading, she said, “No, there’s not really anybody.” Her reason: “It’s just something I do on my own.” Amelia made it known that her friends were not influential in her reading, and she offered a very simple explanation: “I don’t read what they read.” She added, “They don’t read what I read.” She made it known that once outside the classroom door, her reading choices were based on her own

personal decisions: “Things are different. I read different kinds of books.” She pointed out that because she had different interests, she rarely, if ever, recommended books to her friends. When she was asked whether her friends recommended books to her, she replied, “The odd time, but not often.” Interestingly, quite the opposite was the situation with Juliet in relation to her friends. “We practically all take out the same books.” Although Juliet and her friends regularly read the same books, she told me they rarely talked about the books they read. Despite this being a frequent practice, Juliet stressed, “But we don’t talk about them.” Ben’s experiences were similar. When asked whether he ever talked to his friends about his reading, Ben responded, “That never happens.” Although he did not offer much in the way of a detailed explanation, Ben was not unlike Katrina in that both revealed they simply wanted to keep their reading private and to themselves.

Reading was often a private matter for the five participants in the study. Not only were they selective in terms of the friends they chose to talk to about their reading, but as it happened, they were also very selective in relation to other significant people in their lives, namely family members. Interestingly, when the participants talked about whom they talked to at home about their reading, no one mentioned his or her father or stepfather. In the case of Juliet, it was likely because she lived in a single-parent home with her mother and her four siblings. For the others, they simply said, “No,” and never provided any details when asked whether they shared their reading with their fathers. In relation to their mothers, the participants were not as unanimous. Out of the 5 participants, only Katrina, Reece, and Juliet indicated that they rarely discussed their reading with their mothers, but they instead chose to keep their reading private.

With regard to other family members such as siblings, Reece, for instance, expressed that she rarely talked to her sisters about her reading although she frequently turned to her older sister

for books and recommendations about books. Reece told me she chose to keep her reading private because her sisters simply did not care what she thought. She recalled a time when she read a book her two sisters had previously read and remembered her sisters were not particularly interested in what she had to say about it. She explained why: “Like, both my sisters have read the series or at least, like, the first few books, so they know what it’s about and stuff, so they don’t really care what I have to say about it.” Reece indicated that although her older sister loaned her books, she rarely talked to her about the books she borrowed.

In this respect, Ben, Katrina, and Juliet were no different. Ben’s stories were similar in that he rarely read what his friends read and rarely engaged in social activities that revolved around what he and his friends read. Ben mentioned he did not know what his sister and brother read, and although he did not make a secret of what he read, he nonetheless preferred to keep it private from his siblings. Katrina was not alone in this respect. She said she did not talk to anyone about what she read. When she was asked whether she remembered having any conversations with anyone that centered on the books she was reading, she responded, “No.” Katrina’s relationship with her brothers was much the same in that she never talked to them about her reading. Juliet’s reading was also private and not something she shared with her older sister. Again, it was just something she preferred to keep to herself because they had different interests: “She reads about superstition and vampire stories.”

Amelia also had a private side that she protected and guarded from others. She told me that she did not want her brothers to know what she read, so she purposefully searched for new book titles they did not know. Amelia highlighted this point when she was asked about her next reading adventure. She said, “I like *The Dead* series because my brother isn’t reading it.” The private nature of reading reared itself again, and this time in relation to the family’s shared iPad,

when Amelia articulated that the reason she wanted her own was so that she could keep her reading to herself: “Then I would have more privacy with the books I get. So my brothers don’t really know what I am reading.” Amelia soon realized that it was important to have her own iPad because then she could keep her reading private: “I could put anything I want on there without really asking anybody but my mom, just to see if it was okay.” In order to ensure her privacy, she realized she would not download *The Dead* series: “Cause if it’s on the iPad, my brothers can read it.” The issue of privacy surfaced in Amelia’s stories of reading, and she revealed this when she talked about why she wanted her own iPad: “Cause my brothers can’t take it because it’s mine. So if I can keep it in my room, then my brothers can’t take it and read it.” Amelia raised both the issue of privacy and the importance of ownership, not just in relation to the family-shared iPad, but also when she talked about what it meant to have her own book: “Well, my brothers can’t take it because it’s mine and I can put it wherever I want kind of.” For Amelia, reading was a private matter, and unless she chose otherwise, she preferred to keep it this way.

In relation to their varied reading practices using their numerous digital and electronic devices, the participants varied with regard to their privacy. Amelia, for one, informed me that although her mother was always present when she emailed her friends, she was not present when she accessed YouTube or played video games. Amelia said, “I do that alone.” Such was the situation with Reece with respect to her online activities. However, as far as Facebook was concerned, a different set of rules applied. Reece mentioned that her mother had access to her Facebook account and checked her messaging periodically.

When the participants exposed the private dimension of their reading, they all told similar stories in relation to their social interactions with their teachers and the influence they had on reading. In the stories the participants shared, a common thread throughout was the absence of

stories that revealed the involvement of their teachers. Not one spoke about a teacher who influenced or supported his or her reading. All five study participants expressed that they rarely, if ever, had conversations with their teachers about books or their reading outside of school. In our discussions on this topic, the participants expressed they did not want their teachers to know what they read outside of school. Juliet articulated this and explained, “I don’t think she needs to know.” “I just want to keep it to myself... my own thing.” Reece reiterated this sentiment and shared how she felt: “It’s not very important that they [teachers] know.” Katrina agreed and expressed her thoughts on the matter: “I would tell her [teacher] if I had to, but I don’t really think it is important.” She went on and explained: “Because she’s already so busy and I wouldn’t really tell her stuff that she doesn’t really need to know, because she already has so many classes.” Amelia echoed the others when asked whether she wanted her teacher to know what she read outside of school: “Um, maybe, not really.” And later, when she was asked whether her reading was something she wanted to keep separate, she replied, “Yes.” When Katrina was asked directly whether there was anything she wanted to tell her teacher about her reading if the opportunity presented itself, she responded, “Um, not really.” Katrina explained, “I think that I would keep that private.” When Ben was asked a similar question, he simply replied, “I don’t know.” When the discussion turned to whether their teachers ever recommended books or any reading material, all five participants replied, “No.” Interestingly, the participants all gave the same response when they were asked whether they wanted their teachers to give them recommendations of books or reading material for them to read. When the participants talked about how they rarely shared aspects of their reading lives with their teachers, they also revealed that their teachers rarely raised the topic of their out-of-school reading with them. Juliet told me she never had conversations with her teachers about her reading and that her teachers did not ask

her what she was reading. She also said her teachers never talked about books, nor did they offer any recommendations. Katrina, Ben, Reece, and Amelia's stories were similar in this regard. Not one of the five participants acknowledged their teachers as having influenced his or her reading outside of school. On the same matter, none of the participants identified the library clerk either. They mentioned that her time was cut to only the morning and that she was not in the library during their book exchange.

When the discussions turned to what might be helpful for their teachers to know about them as readers, both Ben and Juliet pointed out that it might be helpful if their teachers had some knowledge about their reading interests, because then they would know what they liked to read. Ben, for one, explained, "That might inform what she picks." Juliet commented that her teacher might want to know about her reading interests, "that I like stories. All types of books but mostly diaries." When Katrina was given the opportunity to share her thoughts on the matter, she was non-committal. She replied, "I'm not sure." Although it appeared the participants were not opposed to their teachers knowing their reading interests, they were partial to keeping their reading private, and they each had personal reasons for maintaining the status quo.

A Place I Can Just Read Peacefully

When the participants talked about their reading, they revealed the significance of place and space, and the importance of privacy, and brought attention to the notion that reading is often a solitary activity. Although they did not talk at great length on this topic, it was nonetheless something that was important to them, to have solitude at times with their reading. When the participants talked about place and space, they also highlighted the importance of their physical environment and the conditions they considered ideal for reading.

Reece's ideal place and space for reading was in the privacy of her bedroom, where "I can just read peacefully." In her pre-interview activity drawing, Reece opted to draw a picture that represented a space or place where she enjoyed reading. Reece drew a picture of the canopy bed in her bedroom. "I drew my bed with a canopy over it because I like reading there, because I feel like I'm protected from everything around and I can just like be a character in my book." When she talked about this special place, she said, "I feel like the canopy protects me from the outside world and I can live in my book like the character."

The significance of place and space and the notion of privacy was also apparent in Juliet's stories of reading. In her pre-interview drawing, Juliet also chose to draw a picture of a place or space where she enjoyed reading. Juliet's drawing was of her bedroom, where she displayed her bunk bed and a window. She described her picture of her bedroom as the place where she liked to read, and her favourite spot was on the top bunk bed. On her picture she wrote, "Here's the reasons why: it's comfy, it's warm, and I can store my books on the window sill." Neatly placed on her window sill was her favourite collection of books. Juliet told me she preferred to read in her bedroom "mainly because it's quieter." Juliet explained what happened in her cozy and comfy reading place: "Well, mostly I put on music, and then I go up and start reading a book that I have already read maybe a few times before." Although she liked the quietness of her bedroom, she also liked some noise, which is why she said she often listened to the radio. Other than in her bedroom, finding a place to read was not an easy task, especially with two younger siblings and one older sister. It was especially difficult since Juliet's family lived in a small house and her younger siblings constantly wanted her attention. Juliet indicated that in the summer she often escaped the confines of her small house to read outdoors. Her

favourite place and/or space to read was outside on her trampoline. She explained why it was so inviting: “Cause the trampoline is black and it absorbs heat, and then it is really warm on there.”

The significance of place and space was just as important for Amelia, who made it perfectly clear when she was asked whether there was anything she wanted her parents to know about her reading. She responded, “That I need my space.” For Amelia, that could be any number of places – in her bedroom, the cozy couch in the living room, in the car, on the bus, or the hockey arena dressing room – as long as it was quiet. Otherwise, she said, “I will get distracted and I don’t focus on what I am reading.” Reading served as an escape, particularly “to get away from my brothers.” She described a picture of a familiar scenario in her home: “I shut the door and say leave me alone, and then I read.” Amelia was just as articulate about what she could not tolerate, which revealed that she definitely had set out boundaries for herself: “Like, if someone is reading over my shoulder, I don’t like that.” She told me that her older brother was guilty of this: “Sometimes I’m reading and he is looking over my shoulder.” One place Amelia found where she could read without anyone looking over her shoulder was the hockey arena dressing room. Although under usual circumstances this would not be possible, she explained how this worked to her advantage: “Cause I have my own little dressing room, because I am not supposed to change with the guys anymore.” Being that she was alone in the hockey dressing room, this place provided her with the perfect scenario where she could read in solace and privacy.

Katrina was no different than the others in relation to wanting her own private place and space to read; however, she required something different. “I have to have some noise, like someone talking in the background otherwise I couldn’t pay attention.” She stressed that at home she preferred to have the television on in her bedroom because it helped her to focus and stay on

topic. The white noise that the television emitted provided just the right environment for Katrina to focus on her reading.

Ben was an enigma in some sense in relation to place and space and reading. Although he mentioned he typically read downstairs in his bedroom, where it was quiet, he indicated he had no preferences. However, when Ben was asked to select a drawing activity in the pre-interview stage of the data collection phase, out of all the possibilities, he chose to draw a place and/or space where he enjoyed reading. In his story he revealed that place was significant as it was a salient memory for him. Ben drew a picture of the town library, a place he often frequented with his mother and older brother when he was being home-schooled. When he recalled his special place, he talked about how the library evoked memories of “reading in the red bathtub,” and although it had been years since he visited the town library, it is obvious that the library remained a special place that conjured up very pleasant and vivid memories for him in relation to reading.

Although the participants talked only briefly about the private nature of their reading in relation to place and space they liked to read, it was evident that it was important to them. It was also very personal and individual. It was a part of their lives that they protected and guarded from others, and were selective about choosing. When picturing Reece, Juliet, and Amelia alone in their bedroom, protected under the canopy, wrapped in covers, or nestled high up on the bunk bed, each absorbed with book in hand, it is not difficult to conjure up the image of the lone reader engaged in a private and solitary activity.

Readers are multidimensional, and the participants demonstrated this complexity in the stories they shared about their reading experiences. Although they shared similar reading experiences and there appeared to be some commonalities in their choice of traditional print-

based text, reading was an activity that was deeply personal and often a private affair for each participant. From their rich and descriptive stories of reading they each demonstrated how in making their own choices, they embraced reading in his or her own way.

Theme Three: Readers Face Constraints

In the participants' quest to navigate their own reading lives and to read the texts based on their personal decisions and preferences, the participants spoke about the many constraints they encountered. When they talked about their reading, they revealed a number of situations that seemed to limit, impede, or restrict their reading. In their stories, they revealed the challenges they faced and the frustrations they experienced when they came up against numerous roadblocks that prevented them from reading what they wanted to read, both at home and at school. Their stories also highlighted the apparent disconnect that exists between their in- and out-of-school reading. The reading life they lived in school seemed to be inconsistent with the life they lived outside of school.

Constraints on Book Selection

A major constraint on their reading was the restrictions and rules in school. For example, both Amelia and Ben encountered a roadblock that centered on the school rule about appropriate books. Both examples exposed what could be perceived as censorship rearing itself, which suggests that, in this particular school, a decision was made that certain books were only for certain audiences. In the first example of being denied access to a particular book, Ben recounted a visit to a recent school book fair during evening parent-teacher interviews, when he wished to purchase the graphic novel *Cardboard*. When he brought it to the counter to pay for it, he encountered difficulty from the volunteer mom.

She asked me, “Where did you get this book,” and it said, like, “For a more mature reader,” and then she said, “What grade are you in?” And she said, “You can’t get that unless your mom or dad is here.”

When Ben disclosed he was in the sixth grade, he was told to put the book back because it was considered a mature read and not suitable for younger readers. When we discussed this event, he expressed dismay and confusion. He indicated that although he knew there would likely be mature content in the book, he neither understood nor agreed with the reasons why he could not purchase it. He clearly revealed this dismay when he said, “I think it is kind of weird, but I never really thought that you’d have to be old enough to buy a book.” Ben’s statement is very powerful and one that as educators we need to pay attention to. When I asked him how he felt when he was told to put it back, he replied, “I didn’t really like it.” Although Ben could have purchased the book with his parents’ permission, he never bothered to get their signatures. He explained, “Even though my mom would have let me have the book, I just got a different book about these two kids, Pepsi and Coke.” When I visited Ben during the home literacy dig in January, he showed me the graphic novel he had wanted to buy at the school book fair. He told me he received it for Christmas from his parents.

In the second example of censorship, Amelia encountered her roadblock in the school library. She told me there were books she wanted to sign out in the school library, but they were off limits to sixth-grade students because they were housed on the junior high bookshelf. Amelia stated the school rule was that these books could only be accessed with parental consent. She described an incident in the school library where she wanted to get the next book in the series she was reading at home. She explained, “Number 2 and number 3 of *39 Clues* was on the junior high shelf, and I can’t take those books without a note from my parents.” She expressed her

frustration with the school rule when she remarked, “I can’t go there. And I already read those books.” Amelia told me that this upset her because she did not think it was fair that she could not sign out a book she was capable of reading, one she was already reading at home. She said, “They are there, and a lot of other ones, I don’t really like them.” She indicated she was not allowed to select books on this junior high bookshelf because “I haven’t got that note yet.” Reece explained what happened if someone signed out a library book from the wrong shelf: “When they sign it out, then she’ll [the educational assistant] say you are not allowed to take this book.”

Though the school rule was a source of frustration for Amelia and Ben, in asserting their agency they saw their way around their roadblock and sought other means to get the books they wanted. Reece also encountered a roadblock and it involved the lack of selection in the school library. In her opinion, “We don’t have a lot of series in our library; it’s just mainly random books.” Amelia echoed this sentiment. She emphasized she was not particularly interested in the books in the school library and said, “Not many appeal to me.”

Reece talked about another roadblock, and this time it involved her book selection and her network of friends in school. Her stories revealed that her school friends were sometimes too influential with respect to the choices she made about her reading. As she put it, “Most people take out the same kind of book, like the same topic of books.” Reece made this clear in the following exchange:

JW: So your circle of friends, they will kind of take out the same book?

R: Ya, like the chapter books that are more like fact.

JW: So your friends right now are reading the *Dear Canada* books?

R: Ya, most of my friends have.

JW: So, it’s kind of being in the same group, everyone does the same thing?

R: Ya.

In a turn of events, Reece's roadblock involved her book selection and, this time, censorship that was imposed by her mother and grandmother. Reece recounted a time when she wanted to read a book called *Child Called It*, by Dave Pelzer, a book she noticed on the bookshelf at her grandmother's house and later spotted on the mature shelf in the school library. She related that both her mother and grandmother read the book and had reservations about Reece reading it. She described the event: "I saw it, and I saw my mom read it, and it looked interesting to me, so I asked her, and she said not yet." Reece related that although her mom eventually gave her permission, Reece reconsidered her decision after she read the first few pages to the part where it read, "The boy got abused for asking for food." Once she determined the content was too mature for her and that she was not ready for it, she made her own personal decision not to read it.

School-Based Constraints

As far as constraints on reading in school, Ben was vocal about not having choice when he shared what he disliked about the school reading program: "When we get partnered up or don't get the book we want." He particularly detested "when we have to read things out loud." Ben mentioned the latter was often the reason he did not want to go to school. He was not the only one to raise this aversion for reading aloud in school. The other participants also mentioned that, if given the choice, they would rather read silently. They also wanted to have more autonomy to choose their reading material. From their storied accounts of reading in school, they all revealed feelings of being disempowered in that they had little say over certain aspects of their school reading program in terms of the way they read (orally), what they read (teacher-selected), how they read (groupings), and with whom (configurations based on reading levels).

The apparent disconnect between their out- and in-school reading practices was also glaringly evident in relation to technology use and the different realities the participants faced in their day-to-day life in school. Of their digital devices, all four participants articulated that they were not permitted to use their iPod touch other than during recess and lunch breaks. “You can have it with you in class, like in your pocket, but if you pull it out, it will get taken.” With the privilege, however, came a downside associated with the rules of school. If their iPod touch or any other digital device was spotted during class time by a teacher, it would be confiscated, as Reece related. When Ben was asked what he would do if this happened to him, he said, “I don’t know, I would probably just sit around not doing much.” To prevent this situation, the participants often hid their devices in their boots, in their lockers, or safely tucked into their pockets. Ben preferred the latter, and he had good reason: “I don’t feel my iPod is safe in my locker because if there’s a fire, they are not responsible for iPods and phones and stuff.”

When the topic was raised as to whether digital devices should be allowed in their classroom and how they could be used, not surprisingly they each had a strong opinion on the ways they could be utilized. Although most of them voiced the positive value they would bring to their learning, it was not unanimous. Ben, for one, saw the downside: “Well, I guess it would have to be really strict, because I know if you weren’t with it, then I myself would play games.” He revealed not only the issue of trust but also the inevitable complications that might arise from technology: “I think it would be cool, but at the same time, it would be hard because they are not, like, giving batteries, so they are not supplying charged batteries. Ya, lots of them won’t last six hours.” Reece also saw the pitfalls that technology brings. She offered a few reasons:

- “Well on my iPod it is kind of hard to do because you need Internet connection.”
- “Ya, the sizing and sometimes it doesn’t work the way you want it to.”
- “On your iPod you have to make it bigger; you have to go up and down.”

Reece was not all negative, however. She indicated the device could be a fun way to learn: “Well, like in French, well, all the teachers get an iPad when they teach, so in French we use that to play, to learn French. We could download that app.” Juliet saw the educational value and echoed Reece: “Maybe for French we could download an app.” Katrina agreed: “Well, there’s a bunch of French games for our French class.” Katrina was of the opinion that an app could replace traditional print-based resources. “We could use them as textbooks instead of having the actual pages.” Juliet envisioned its use as an incentive and a reward: “And after we are done, like, work, we could turn off the sound and play some games.” Amelia thought digital devices should be allowed in the classroom as a learning tool “because, like, on iPods you could, like, look up things, like if the teacher asked you a question, you could look it up and check to see it.” As well, she reasoned, “We could use them for learning things, like looking up apps.” Amelia also envisioned that it could be used to access maps, which was not unexpected given her penchant for maps. Amelia mentioned that her teachers had iPads and that they used them to enhance the learning experience: “Ya, the teachers at our school all have iPads now just to, like, help to download things so that we can all learn better.” Though the rules in the school forbade the use of digital devices inside the classroom for students, Amelia and the other girls all shared plausible ways that digital devices could be a good thing to use as learning tools.

Personal/Economic Constraints

The roadblock Juliet faced also involved technology, but her stories centered on the lack of access to a coveted digital artifact and highlighted the issue of equity and cultural capital. The device was the one treasured possession that was owned by most of Juliet’s sixth-grade classmates, the highly revered iPod touch device. Not having access to this device exposed Juliet to being an outsider amongst her peer group because she could not fully participate in the social

activities that centered on the various uses of the iPod touch device. Many of these activities would have enabled Juliet to sustain and maintain connections and relationships with her peers. Given that many of Juliet's friends used their iPod touch during recess and lunch breaks, not having her own device to use in school prevented her from engaging in a variety of gaming and communication activities that her friends enjoyed.

For Katrina and Amelia, being able to interact in various communicative spaces with friends was just as important. However, as a social platform, Facebook was inaccessible to them because both their mothers had deemed they were not old enough. Apparently, as Amelia pointed out, "it's 16, and I'm not old enough." Amelia was referring to the age restriction Facebook placed upon users to open accounts and a rule which her mother apparently adhered to. When she was asked about her various uses of her iPod touch device, Amelia revealed her frustrations at not being able to interact in this way: "I don't have, like, iMessage or any of those kinds of things yet. But my friends have them, so I just – whenever I am with them, I will text somebody." About the social benefits of having Facebook she said, "It would be another way, like if you are not in town, to talk to my friends to tell them – like, I could ask them for homework or something." Although Katrina initially related her apprehension about Facebook, because, as she said, "there are a lot of creeps on there that could do something to you," she later expressed she still wanted it for the same reasons as the others: to check what her friends were doing. When asked how she would use it, she said, "I would probably, like, text once a day and, like, go on it once a day or something."

In relation to personal constraints on reading, Juliet faced another roadblock that prevented her from reading, and this one involved her child-minding responsibilities at home. Juliet shared that she often had to tend to her younger siblings after school and on weekends, and

because of this she often had little time to read. Although Juliet did not complain about her situation, not having her own time to read was a source of frustration for her. She, however, found her way around her dilemma and read at night when her siblings went to bed.

From their stories of reading, the participants demonstrated that, in their quest to make their reading life their own, they were often confronted with roadblocks and obstacles that seemed to limit, impede, or restrict their reading. What was common throughout the participants' stories was how their strong sense of agency prevailed. Because no matter what constraints they faced, they more often than not found ways to navigate around their obstacles, and in the end they usually got what they sought after. In this way, they took charge of their reading and lived the reading life they chose.

Through their rich and descriptive stories, the five participants highlighted how they each exercised agency and autonomy in the different ways they forged their own reading paths and made their own decisions about their everyday reading practices in relation to what they read, where, why, in what ways, and with whom. In this sense, their reading was relevant and meaningful and situated in the relationships that they desired to maintain and nurture. The desire to be a person in his or her own right, with agency in matters that were important, was clearly evident in the stories the participants shared with me about their experiences as readers.

The findings in this chapter outlined and summarized the reading practices of the five study participants as they experienced reading in their everyday lives. The findings were organized around three topics for discussion as they related to and supported the data and the purpose of the study: 1) *Everyday reading is meaningful*; 2) *Reading has personal and private dimensions*; 3) *Readers face constraints*.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, REFLECTION, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the discussion, analysis, and implications of my findings. The chapter begins with a summary of the study and includes the background, purpose, research questions, and methodology. The second part of the chapter presents four main topics for discussion based on the findings in Chapter Four, and then it makes links to the literature and the research that framed my study. The third part of the chapter consists of a discussion of the implications for action and provides recommendations for future research on the topic. The chapter ends with my reflections and the conclusion.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of my study was to explore reading practices in the lives of early adolescent students from their perspectives by examining in more depth how they use reading in their everyday lives. This study was borne out of my deep-rooted curiosity about children's everyday reading practices, which began as an interest in the widespread perception that young people today are not reading. When I considered that the nature of reading is constantly changing and that many reading studies were not addressing the new literacies, I knew that this would be a valuable area of study. My study is grounded in a sociocultural theoretical framework and Vygotskian (1978) principles, which emphasize the collaborative nature of learning, where learners construct their personal understandings of their world through their social interactions in association with the tools of their culture. To explore the everyday reading lives of young people, I employed a conceptual framework that focuses on reading as a situated social practice within a particular historical time and cultural context in the tradition of New Literacy Studies (NLS). Halliday's (1975) work on the seven functions of language also served as a framework to

analyze how young people use reading in their everyday lives. In contrast to many of the traditional studies on students' reading interests, I expanded the narrow definition of reading to include the reading of multimodal text.

To start my inquiry process, I began my study with an entry question: What are the perspectives of early adolescent students on their reading? In my study I explored students' perspectives on the types of texts they read, the purposes they have for reading, the people who have influenced their reading, and their social interactions with peers and others in relation to their reading. My study was guided by the following secondary questions: 1) How do they use reading in their everyday lives? 2) What do they identify as their purposes and interests in reading? 3) How do they characterize the involvement of teachers, parents, peers, and others in their reading? I was particularly interested in exploring how reading helped shaped their identities, and which experiences and practices supported or impeded their engagement in reading. I designed a qualitative study to explore early adolescent students' perspectives on their own reading in response to my theoretical position that reading is a social practice that encompasses many literacy practices, including non-traditional print resources. I utilized a qualitative interpretive inquiry methodology to advance my understanding of students' experiences and to make sense of what is important to them, what they care about, and what motivates their reading practices (Ellis, 1998b). To explore early adolescent students' perspectives on their reading in their everyday lives, I selected five students in the sixth grade. The parents of the students and their sixth-grade teachers were also included as participants, and they provided the background information I used to describe the context for the study. My data collection was approached from a hermeneutic stance and consisted of a pre-interview activity, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, and literacy digs conducted both in the

school and in the home. Making sense of and interpreting the data from a holistic approach throughout the study also involved taking a hermeneutic stance in my data analysis. From the participants' rich, thick, and descriptive stories, three central themes emerged as they related to and supported the purpose of my study and my research questions: 1) Everyday reading is meaningful; 2) Reading has personal and private dimensions; 3) Readers face constraints.

In deriving meaning from my findings, I have encapsulated my understandings of the findings into four main topics for discussion in relation to the literature, and they are: 1) They read more than they realize; 2) They read on their own terms; 3) Reading provides social cultural capital; and 4) Medium matters. In this chapter I integrate the knowledge gleaned from my findings with the theoretical framework and the relevant literature and research in the field. This chapter closes with a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for future research.

They Read More Than They Realize

The perception that young people today are not reading is pervasive in the media (BBC, September 6, 2004; *The Globe and Mail*, 2011; *USA Today*, 2008) and in the research literature (Fasick et al., 2005; National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], 2007; Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS], 2006). But if reading is more broadly defined, there is a whole range of practices that would count as reading. This wider view is consistent with New Literacy Studies (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993) where reading is conceptualized as a socially situated practice embedded in everyday life, but it is different than some of the other literature that does not account for the changing nature of reading and the varied ways reading is practiced today (Botzakis & Malloy, 2005; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Twist et al., 2003). A *New York Times* (2008) article describes online reading as being “the

enemy of reading – diminishing literacy, wrecking attention spans and destroying a previous common culture that exists only through the reading of books” (Rich, 2008). In a 2004 NEA Report, *Reading at Risk*, Gioia claims, “The decline in reading correlates with increased participation in a variety of electronic media, including the *Internet*, video games, and portable digital devices” (xii).

Contrary to the rhetoric in popular and research literature and contrary to what their teachers are saying, the five young people in my study read a wide variety of texts, but others would not have noticed this because, if asked, they would not count digital reading as reading. This view ties in to what constitutes reading and how young people define reading in the context of their time. What I discovered in my findings is that the young people in my study read more than they realize, and they read more than most people around them realized, including their parents and teachers. They also read more than I thought and more than a survey would have revealed.

The research process influences and becomes part of the findings in a qualitative interpretive study. The value of doing an interpretive study was that it allowed me to learn through stories particulars about young people’s constructions of reading that I would not have otherwise known. For example, the pre-interview activity and open-ended questions enabled me to learn many things that the young people themselves would not have just told me about their reading, because in some instances, such as with Ben, they had not previously thought about things in that way. As Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer (2006) point out, “We have to go beyond statistical average and turn to accounts of individual readers” (p. 147). It was not through surveys and checklists, but through the interview process and the warm relationships that developed through our meaning-making conversations over a period of five months, that I was

able to gain insights and understandings of how five young people use reading in their everyday lives. As Carson (1986) points out, “Conversation has the potential for richness and the exchange of experiences when it is not merely used as an effective technique for data gathering, but used as a hermeneutical reflection”(p. 77). With this deeper understanding, I was able to learn the purposeful ways these young people engaged with text and engaged in the varied textual practices they valued. Also invaluable to me were the literacy digs (Taylor, 2000) as a method for data collection as they helped me learn about the cultural artifacts that were meaningful to these young people and allowed me a glimpse into the world that they inhabit. It was through conducting literacy digs that I was able to understand the significance of the iPod touch digital device in their lives. I realized its importance when I heard the excitement in their voices as they showed me their video games and when they taught me to play them. In conceptualizing artifactual literacies, Pahl and Rowsell (2010) explain their significance: “Objects carry emotional resonance, and these infuse stories. Objects uncover people and epistemologies. Not having respect for an object undermines a way of understanding in the world, cutting off an important line of inquiry” (p. 10).

Initially, when I asked the participants about their reading preferences and what they read, I got conventional answers; basically, their traditional print-based text choices and their responses were generally consistent with the findings of quantitative studies (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen, 2005; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). However, as our interviews progressed and when the definition of reading was expanded to include a wide range and multimodal text (Bearne, 2005; Coiro, 2003; Kress, 2003), it became apparent that reading encompassed a great deal more for these young people, and it was much more than they realized. Because the young people in my study initially had a restricted and narrow (print-

based) view of reading, they did not consider all this “other stuff” to be reading. This finding is consistent with other studies (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Love & Hamston, 2003; Kelly, 2010) in which researchers have found their participants had a restricted and conventional view as to what constitutes reading. When the young people in my study spoke about their reading preferences, not one initially mentioned any digital-based text preferences in our conversations about what they read. However, as the study progressed and as I learned more about their everyday reading practices, it became clear that they were engaged in digital and online practices and over the course of the study and many conversations, they started to see them as legitimate reading. Thus, the extent of how much the young people read depends on how reading is defined. When the topic was initially raised about their digital text practices, all of the participants referred to their varied activities as “playing with technology.” What I learned from the participants, and what is unique in my study, was that they were not concerned about what counts as reading, nor was it very important to them. They did not differentiate or ask, “Is this reading or not reading?” It never seemed to be an issue for them. They do not distinguish between traditional print-based and digital reading. It is just what serves their particular purposes and needs. For the participants, their varied digital and online activities were just everyday practices. To them, it was just a natural process, just as natural as learning to talk. What Reece so eloquently implied is that it is hard to see outside of your culture when it is all you have ever known. Clearly, the young digital natives in my study were more focused on the activity (texting friends, playing the game, searching for lyrics) because it functioned successfully for them. Precisely as Halliday (1969) theorized in his model of language functions, language functioned as a tool to achieve their individual goals. The young people in my study were not concerned about whether something was reading or not reading. It seems that the only people it matters to,

is us (educators, researchers, media, and the public). Because they were not too concerned about what reading is, perhaps we should not be too concerned about defining it either. So the situation merits the question: What is all the fuss about? Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer (2006) alluded to this situation when they said, “It does not matter if we call this engagement with alternative texts ‘reading’ or if we call it something else” (p. 118), what is more important is that young people are voluntarily reading and finding pleasure in multimedia texts. Since it is not an issue for the young people in my study, they may not understand why it is important for researchers and teachers to know, and that might be why some people underestimate the frequency and depth of their reading.

Not only do the young people in my study read more often than they realize, but they read more than other people think they do. This difference in perception about their reading was evident in my interviews with the two teachers in my study, who, apart from their perceptions of Amelia, did not perceive the other participants as being readers outside of school. This raises questions about how well teachers really know their students. The findings also revealed that traditional print-based forms of reading are still the privileged form of text. Mrs. Jones revealed the prominence of the print medium when she talked about her perceptions of reading. She pointed out that although the participants often talked about the video games they played, they rarely talked about what they read outside of school. Mrs. Snow made a similar point when she discussed her interactions with Ben and how their conversations mainly revolved around technology, video games and not reading. Rather than capitalizing on their students’ out of school digital practices as a way to enrich the learning experiences in the classroom, it is evident from the comments of both teachers that they share a belief that reading is competing with technology and that these media are conflicting and cannot exist together. Carrington and

Robinson (2009) referred to these tensions as “wicked issues” (p.3) and argued that: “Some of these new technologies, particularly ones used at home or for social interaction, rest somewhat uncomfortably in schools and are still not universally assured of a place in classroom practice” (p. 3). In my study, Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Snow also raised two other important points: the prevailing emphasis in school on traditional print-based text and the view of reading from the narrowest perspective.

This view of text in my study is consistent with Coles and Hall (2002), who highlighted that “school definitions of literacy have been slow to change and slow to acknowledge the changing nature of literacy in society” (p. 106). They concluded that:

Those who work with young people will be at a disadvantage in understanding their responses to literature and reading unless they have some understanding of, and interest in, the reading culture that those young people are busy constructing and reconstructing in their everyday lives. (p. 97).

Prensky (2001a) pointed out that “digital immigrants,” (p. 3) a term he coined to refer to people who were not born into the digital age and who retain a foot in the past, “typically have very little appreciation for new skills that the ‘natives’ have acquired and perfected through years of interaction and practice” (p. 4). More recently, Chandler-Olcott and Lewis (2010) spoke to the importance of changing our perceptions of what constitutes reading when they said, “Teachers whose cultural models of reading revolve around transactions with book-length print texts may inadvertently send the message to students who are committed and engaged readers of online text that such reading is less valuable” (p. 165).

Perhaps when young people’s various screen practices are perceived to be more valuable, young people themselves might stop referring to their electronic and digital text practices as

“playing with technology” and instead acknowledge these forms as legitimate forms of reading. “Playing” has connotations of something that is not serious, frivolous, or of wasting one’s time. Dana Gioia, the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), alluded to various uses of technology as “playing” when he said: “Whatever the benefits of newer electronic media, they provide no measurable substitute for the intellectual and personal development initiated and sustained by frequent reading” (p. 4). Gee (2003), a gaming theorist, would argue that multimodal texts such as video games, for example, are social-cultural practices that are highly intellectual and incredibly complex problem-solving activities, and they require specialist knowledge and critical thinking skills. Gee (2003) pointed out that “People playing video games are indeed learning ‘content,’ albeit usually not the passive content of school-based facts” (p. 943). Rowsell and Burke (2009) also found that youths’ everyday digital reading practices are highly complex and require a semiotic understanding as well as a specialized repertoire of skills that teachers are failing to recognize, and consequently, “without this understanding, educators are only scratching the surface of their students’ learning capacities” (p. 117). Furthermore, Ito et al (2008) argued that in addition to “hanging out” and “messaging around” (p. 2-3), today’s youth engage in media and technology “in an intense, autonomous, and interest-driven way” (p.28) for purposes of “geeking out” (p. 3), which, as they described, involves “learning to navigate esoteric domains of knowledge and practice and participating in communities that traffic in these forms of expertise” (p.28). In contrast to Gioia’s (2007) statement about electronic media providing no measurable substitute for intellectual and personal development, in my study the young people’s use of technology provided them with enormous benefits and enabled them to engage in multiple digital reading practices that afforded them many opportunities for intellectual engagement and personal identity work. Proponents of the sociocultural perspective,

and particularly New Literacy Studies scholars, contend that reading is always situated in a particular context and young people engage in reading practices with diverse texts and tools in ways that are important to them for their own particular purposes.

Since digital technologies are “fixtures of youth culture” (Ito et al., 2008, p. 1) and are embedded in the everyday lives of young people, it is important to broaden our conceptions of what reading is, and, when we do, young people may realize that they are reading more than they realize and much more than most people realize. Perhaps this change will take time and O’Donnell (1998) was right when he said, “It takes several generations to get past the point of depending on the old medium for a way to think about the new and to get to the point of exploiting the new medium artfully in its own right” (p. 42).

They Read on Their Own Terms

When the participants in my study shared their experiences of reading in their everyday lives, the findings revealed that they read, but they read on their own terms. By this I mean that they each followed their own reading interests and desires in a self-directed and deliberate way, for purposes that fulfilled specific and meaningful functions in their lives. In this sense, the participants are unique individuals who had a strong sense of agency and forged their own path. This uncovering brings to the fore social constructivist thinking and Vygotsy’s (1978) first basic tenet: “Humans are active, vigorous participants in their own existence and that at each stage of development children acquire the means by which they can competently affect their world and themselves” (p. 123). In their seminal work, James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) point out that children are not compulsive, nor are they incomplete, but instead they form a body of social actors with rights and needs of their own. Furthermore, Halliday (1969) supports that all people use language purposefully to fulfill functions in their literate lives, and his presence in my study

with respect to his seven functions of language is evident in the ways the five young people talked about their reading experiences with both traditional print-based and digital text.

When the participants shared their stories, I was struck by the wisdom they possessed and the thoughtful insights they shared about themselves as readers. They were very forthcoming and candid individuals, who were not afraid to show who they are as readers. Their straightforward, matter-of-fact attitude exuded an air of confidence, which demonstrated that they live the reading life they choose. This is in contrast to their school reading, where the teacher most often chooses the books. This scenario highlights the external influences of power and the issue of who chooses what someone reads. It raises the question of to what extent do schools listen to and honour the choices of students. Street (1984) argues that literacy (reading) is complex and as such always carries particular meanings and involves certain power relations. The apparent disconnect between home and school, and specifically feelings of being disempowered to make their own choices, was an issue and a source of tension for the participants in my study. Power is an important concept in my study, a concept that Kelly (2010) made reference to in her study when she described the school setting as being “carefully micromanaged . . . with rigid rules of compliance and passivity and limited opportunities for social interactions” (p. 192), with an almost exclusive reliance on print-based text. This scenario was similar to the situation in school that my participants described. In contrast, when the participants in my study talked about their reading out of school, they spoke about being empowered and that reading was meaningful and fulfilled functions in their everyday lives.

The young people in my study exercised personal agency and enacted and shaped their identities in a textually mediated world through the social interactions with others, which is central to understanding their reading in their everyday lives from a sociocultural perspective

(Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). By exerting their autonomy, they were able to navigate their own reading lives, and in this way, their reading was personally meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilled certain functions in their lives.

Traditional Print-Based Text

Reading may be complex (Bintz, 1993), but the five young people in my study did not view it as complicated. Reading was fairly straightforward: They knew what they liked and what they did not, and they made their own choices as to what, where, when, with whom, and for what purposes they read.

The young people in my study read print-based text because they get pleasure from reading. However, each being unique individuals, their quality of print-based text experiences differed. Katrina, for example, struggled with reading and was less invested in traditional print. Reading as a pleasurable experience played out when Amelia and Reece described having the similar *flow* experiences that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) theorized. In examining Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of *flow*, Krashen (2004) summarized the *flow* experience as being totally absorbed with an activity, "when the concerns of everyday life and even the sense of self disappear—our sense of time is altered and nothing but the activity itself seemed to matter" (p. 29). In their commentary on pleasurable reading experiences, Ross et al. (2006) reported on how some avid readers describe being "seduced and enthralled" (p. 150) by the text, while others are "as if they have fallen under a spell" (p. 151). Similarly, this same feeling of being caught up in the text was reported by Lynne Sharon Schwartz (1996) in her book, *Ruined by Reading: A Life in Books*, wherein she intimately describes the reading experience as an "exalted, spiritual exercise so utterly engaging that we forget time and mortality along with life's lesser woes, and simply bask in the everlasting present" (pp. 115–116).

Though Ben and Juliet did not express having similar *flow* experiences, they nonetheless experienced the pleasures of reading. Instead of a disinterest in reading, as media headlines (*The Globe and Mail*, 2011; *USA Today*, 2008) and studies have regularly shown (McKool, 2007; Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen, 2005; [NEA] 2007), my findings are consistent with the studies that report that young people find pleasure in reading and that reading is a common leisure practice out of school (Coles & Hall, 2002; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Shumow, Schmidt, & Kackar, 2008). Rather than a decline as the popular rhetoric suggests, young people's dispositions toward reading shifts and changes over time depending on the context and the individuals' purposes for reading (Bintz, 1993; Ivey, 1999). Juliet said as much when she articulated, "Sometimes I read a lot and sometimes I don't." Amelia, Reece, and Juliet expressed that they read more now compared to when they were younger, because they enjoy reading and find it entertaining. Amelia, being a voracious reader, clearly expressed this when she told me that she would never have read a book for two full days when she was younger. Reece started to read more when she became a more skilled and competent reader: Becoming a stronger reader was also the impetus for Juliet to read. For Juliet and Reece, the fourth grade was the turning point and the time that they started to read. Interestingly, a large scale study conducted with Canadian children reported that a steady decline in pleasure reading started in the fourth grade (Fasick, Gagnon, Howarth, & Settingington, 2005). Out of the five participants, Ben and Katrina were the only ones who indicated they read less now than when they were younger and cited their extracurricular activities as the reason. This was not surprising as the young people in my study live very busy lives. Shumow, Schmidt, and Kackar (2008) pointed out that people today are confronted with a plethora of distractions and "are faced with unprecedented choices and competition for how they spend their time out of school" (p. 98), yet reading is a common leisure

practice. Bintz (1994) highlighted that reading is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon in the sense that readers are either avid or passive readers, but, more realistically, reading is on a continuum. Consistent with the results of my study, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) concluded that reading practices fluctuate and that reading is not an “all-or-nothing construct” (p. 366). The young people in my study read, albeit some read more than others, and they all read more than their teachers thought they did.

A key characteristic of early or pre-adolescence is a desire for autonomy (Eccles, 1999), and, as Finders (1997) explained, adolescence is a time to try on adult roles and break away from adult authority. This may explain why the young people in my study made it a practice not to share what they were reading. Reading was a personal and often private matter. However, when they chose to disclose this aspect of their life, they were very selective about with whom they talked and what they shared, and this included their family, friends, and teachers. In relation to their teachers, this finding is consistent with Finders’ (1997) study of adolescent girls, which found that “kids this age don’t want teachers to know that much about them” (p. 29). Although the group of girls in Finders’ study was slightly older, the same conclusion can be made about the young people in my study. Katrina made her privacy explicit when she said, “I wouldn’t really tell her [the teacher] stuff that she doesn’t really need to know.” Perhaps she, like the others, did not want to get too close to the teacher, because they did not want their teachers to tell them what to read, which is similar to what Moore, Alvermann, and Hinchman (2007) found in their survey of adolescent youth. Or it might be the case that they did not want to be judged and perceived as a certain kind of person because they read a certain kind of book, in the way Gee (2008) conceptualized Discourse as a sort of “identity kit,” whereby one is recognized as a “distinctive sort of who” (p. 152), “doing certain sorts of what” (p. 153). This brings to mind a

comment Mrs. Snow made about not-avid readers and how they often gravitated to the graphic novels during their weekly library book exchange. From her comment, one could make the assumption that she viewed graphic novels as being not very complex reading and thus more appropriate for the not-so-serious reader. On the contrary, Hansen, (2012) noted that “imagery and drawings are not inherently less valuable than verbal, ‘literacy’ art. In fact, images often convey a richness and depth of ideas that require interpretation and high-level critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation skills” (p. 59).

In relation to their friendships, my findings are consistent with Finders (1997) study of adolescent girls, which found that the “tough cookies” (p. 109) made it a practice not to talk to anyone about what they were reading. Ben made this clear when he said, “That never happens.” Amelia encapsulated this practice when she said, “It’s just something I do on my own.”

Although Juliet and Reece often selected books based on the influence of their peer culture and read the books their friends read, they rarely discussed them. This finding is in contrast to Blair and Sanford (2004), who found that boys were more likely to select reading material “that can be transported into conversations with their friends” (p. 457). In her study of girls’ hidden literacies, Finders (1997) concluded that keeping their reading private was the way the girls were able to exert their independence, construct their individual identities, and maintain a sense of control over their lives. Although my findings were similar, I did not find that the young people in my study kept their reading “hidden” in the way Finders (1997) did; however, they did not advertise what they were reading either. This discrepancy in findings could be because the young people in my study were slightly younger, and perhaps this behavior is more characteristic of adolescence. Also consistent with my findings, Moore et al. (2007) found that the youth in their study often chose not to talk to their friends about their reading but, instead, kept it private. Once again, in

contrast to my findings, Strommen and Mates (2004) found the opposite, as did Knoester (2010), who reported that the fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-graders enjoyed talking to their friends and their siblings about books they were reading. My findings revealed that discussing reading with siblings rarely happened, especially for Reece, Juliet, Katrina, and Ben, for the simple reason that they just preferred to keep their reading to themselves. Amelia was an outlier in this regard because she occasionally sought out her older brother to talk about the books they read, especially books in which they had a shared interest. Though she had a public side, she also guarded her privacy and was not unlike the others in this respect.

In their quest “to make their life their own” (Schwartz, 1996), and in their desire for independence, the young people in my study sometimes chose to keep their reading private. This was especially evident in their desire for privacy in relation to the places they chose to read. When picturing Reece and Juliet reading alone in their bedroom or Amelia in the hockey change room, it is easy to call to mind the image of the lone reader engaged in a private and solitary activity. Up until the beginning of 21st century, the inclination was to visualize reading as basically the encounter of the lone reader silently engrossed in a solitary act with a book (Ross et al., 2006). Historical accounts often depict the image of the lone reader as privately consumed in a book (Manguel, 1996). Ross et al. (2006) provide the example of Jean Honore Fragonard’s famous 18th century oil painting *Young Girl Reading*, where an elegantly dressed young girl sits in quiet solitude, totally absorbed in a tiny book that she holds in her hand. Pawley (2002) stated, “The image of the lone reader still exercises a powerful hold on the imagination” (p. 144). For the young people in my study, the desire for privacy and solitude was real, and although reading is a social activity, it is also very much still a solitary and private one.

Reading was personal, private, just as it was social. Rosenblatt (2004) called attention to this dichotomy when she explained, “Reading is at once an intensely individual and an intensely social activity, an activity that from the earliest years, involves the whole spectrum of ways of looking at the world” (p. 1396). Making reading their own private matter, exercising agency, and having a sense of control over their lives brings to mind Schwartz (1996) and the following passage, extracted from her book, *Ruined By Reading*. She wrote, from her reflections as a child, how the sense of control was important to her as a reader:

So much of a child’s life is lived for others. We learn what they want us to learn, and show our learning for their gratification. All the reading I did as a child, behind closed doors, sitting on my bed while the darkness fell around me, was an act of reclamation. This and only this I did for myself. This was the way to make my life my own (p. 119).

The young people in my study were agents in their reading. They were independent, strong, and discriminate readers who knew what they liked to read, were selective in what they read, and made their own choices. They all chose reading material based on her own personal interests and individual needs and, like in Hopper’s (2005) findings, read books about issues that were relevant to her life. Moore et al. (2007) also found that personal decisions influenced many of the youths’ literacy practices in their study, but they noted, “This finding complicates some of the earlier research on adolescents that suggests they are sensitive primarily to peer influences” (p. 178). Although Juliet and Reece often made their reading selections based on what they saw their friends reading, friends played a minimal influential role in the relation to how Ben, Katrina, and Amelia selected their reading material. In contrast, a number of other studies found that young readers select books based on the influence of their friends and choose books their

friends read and enjoy (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Hopper, 2005; Wilhelm & Smith, 2014).

When mothers were cited as being reading influences by participants in my study, it was more often in relation to recommending and purchasing books, fostering a culture of reading, and serving as supportive parents. This finding is similar to the findings reported by Moore et al. (2007) and Hughes, Hassell, and Rodge (2007). In contrast to the other participants, Ben and Amelia's mothers played a much more significant role in their reading lives and often read the same books, or, as in Ben's situation, they read books together. This finding is more consistent with Shumow, Schmidt, and Kackar (2008), who found that parents played a more significant role and were "considered common reading companions" (p. 37). This said, Ben and Amelia insisted that they always made their own choices as to what they read.

Driven by their own personal decisions, which exemplified their own strong sense of agency, the young people in my study selected texts that reflected their own interests, desires, and needs, and in this sense their reading was meaningful and fulfilled functions in their lives. Reading is a socially situated practice, and each generation selects texts that are relevant in the context of their own time and in the "material, social and cultural world" (Gee, 2003) into which they were born. This agency was reflected in many of the young people's text choices and was especially transparent where Amelia explained her choice not to read a wildly cultural phenomenon (*Harry Potter*). She declined not only this series of books but also her mother's offer of *Nancy Drew* books, as did Katrina with her aunt's box of her childhood favorite, the *Hardy Boys* series of books. From a sociocultural perspective, reading is a situated social practice that is deeply connected to its historical time and place (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006) and this situated element was evident in their

actions and their purposeful choice of text. Bennie, a participant in a study conducted by Wilhelm and Smith (2014), articulated this viewpoint when he pointed out, “Each generation has their own Harry Potter” (p. 177). He explained that “each generation has their books that help them. Books that encourage imagination. Books that help you with the challenges you are facing. You relate to the characters and are moved by them” (p. 177). Wilhelm and Smith (2014) pointed out that young people gravitate to what they need and they choose books that “help them build on and develop new interests, become competent in new ways, and grow beyond their current selves” (p. 9). Blair and Sanford (2004) maintained that boys need “purposeful interaction with text” (p. 458). Similarly, in my study the young people gravitated to what they needed to satisfy their intellectual and affective needs and chose texts that afforded them opportunities to imagine and explore their identity, to learn, for intellectual engagement, and to be social.

Halliday (1969) put forth an understanding that all people use language (which includes reading) purposefully as a means to fulfill functions in their lives. Halliday’s seven functions of language served as a framework to categorize how the young people in my study used reading, in terms of their traditional print-based text practices, in order to satisfy their intellectual and affective needs. Halliday’s first four functions (*instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal*) satisfied the physical, emotional, and social needs while the remaining three functions (*heuristic, imaginative, representational*) enabled the child to understand his or her environment. In relation to the first four functions, Halliday said that we use language as a means to express needs and to get things done (*instrumental*); to tell others what to do (*regulatory*); to connect with others (*interactional*); and to express individual identity and opinions (*personal*). Similarly, the young people in my study read for many purposes that fulfilled functions in their lives. Their reading served them well because it gave them what they desired and what they needed (e.g. adventure

and escape, lyrics to a song, to show their uniqueness, friendships, etc.). In relation to Halliday's categories, *instrumental* might be useful as a way to categorize when Amelia, for example, read food labels because of a material need to know what she and her family were putting in their bodies. And when Amelia related the information she gleaned from the label on the pickle jar and told her dad not to eat them, Halliday's *regulatory* "do as I tell you" (p. 34) function comes into play. Clearly for Juliet, selecting books that her girlfriends read served her communicative needs for the purpose of sustaining friendships, and that serves the *interactional* function. The *personal* function is related to the expression of identity and played out for Katrina when she realized her talents for crafts or when Reece read the quizzes in the magazines so she could get to know herself better. Halliday described the next three functions as the "non-self side" (p. 31), where the emphasis is on understanding one's environment and begins with the *heuristic* function, which refers to reading to gain knowledge and as a means of learning about things. Amelia often spoke about how in her pursuit for adventure she learned a great deal about historical figures like Benjamin Franklin, for example, which exemplifies the *heuristic* function of language. The *imaginative* function, described as "a way to create through language a world of his own making" (p. 32) served Reece when she stepped into the story world of her favorite series of books in order to re-create a make-believe world in her play activities. Lastly, Halliday's *representational* function, or the use of language to convey information, such as "I've got something to tell you," was exemplified when Juliet got together with her friends to share what they learned about their favorite pop star. Halliday pointed out that "language [reading] is defined for the child by its uses; it is something that serves this set of needs." (p. 34). The young people in my study read traditional print-based text because it served many purposes and functions in their lives. Ultimately, the purpose of reading is to make meaning, and, from the

examples highlighted, it is evident how embedded reading functions were in the everyday lives of these five young people. These examples demonstrated that language functioned as a tool to achieve their goals, as both Halliday (1969) and Vygotsky (1978, 1986) theorized in their studies of language. They explained that language is a resource for mental functioning and human social life. The talk and social practices around the text, Barton (2001) noted, is the “classic literacy event” (p. 99).

Unmistakably, the young people in my study chose texts that had tremendous benefits in their everyday lives, which is similar to Moje et al. (2008), who found that the youth in their study often read for “positive role models of resilience, inspiration, and guidance” (p. 143). Similar to my study, Wilhelm and Smith (2014) found that their participants enjoyed entering the story world “to get rid of me and become someone else” (p. 32). Amelia often talked about immersing herself into the story and becoming the character. Amelia also had an affinity for adventure and complex plots and thrived on the challenge of figuring things out. This is akin to what Rosenblatt (2004) referred to as the lived through experience with the text and described it as the aesthetic reading experience. Reece and Juliet read about other people’s lives so that they could learn how to deal with their own lives. Rosenblatt (2004) maintained that readers often disconnect themselves from the real world in order to reflect on their own life. This experience was not only aesthetic, but likely efferent as well, as both girls read for pragmatic purposes to gain vital information to use in their real life. Moje et al. (2008) found the youth in their study liked to read about people like them: “They also liked to identify with characters who are resilient through struggles, people who are working through relationships, people trying to figure out who they are” (p. 147).

When the young people in my study talked about their digital text practices, their talk resembled the way they talked about their experiences with traditional print-based text in relation to the functionality of the texts they read. Specifically, they gravitated to what they needed for intellectual and affective engagement, and they chose digital texts that afforded them opportunities to extend their learning, explore their identity through their imaginative exploits, engage in intellectual escapades, and connect with other people.

Digital-Based Text

Rooted in The New Literacies Studies perspective, which serves to deepen our understanding of the full range of reading associated with digital and online cultures, digital literacies have opened up new venues for young people to construct and make meaning of their world using all kinds of digital tools and technologies of their culture (Gee, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Reflecting the ever-changing tools and technologies available for reading, the nature of reading is constantly changing, and as Manzo (2003) reminded us, “It seems to be nourishing some new life forms and possibilities” (p. 660). Although his quote is dated, it is still relevant today. More recently, Baird and Fisher (2009) alluded to the changing nature of reading when they said, “The proliferation of old and new media including the Internet and other emerging social and mobile technologies has changed the way students communicate, interact and learn” (p. 65). When the definition of reading is expanded to include the reading of multimodal text, including audio and visual components associated with online and digitized cultures, one finds that young people today read a wide variety of print and digital text. Although digital text practices are embedded in everyday life, the young people in my study had limited opportunities to participate in multimodal environments in the classroom. Traditional print-based text is still the privileged medium used for meaning-making activities in their learning environment. This

finding is consistent with Kelly (2010), who highlighted that in school, “printed text on paper is the preferred information carrier” (p. 192).

In real-life contexts today, young people traverse across “textual landscapes” (Carrington, 2005) with seamless ease, and they interact with many kinds of texts in meaning-making activities across a variety of media (Kelly, 2010; National Literacy Trust, 2012). Reading is a socially situated practice, and for the young people in my study, reading was a continuum, a seamless interaction between the traditional and the new forms of text. Carrington and Robinson (2012) referred to this continuum as “a fluid movement between print and digital text which characterizes the lifeworlds of children and young people” (p. 11). Interestingly, Pahl and Rowsell (2010) echoed Reece’s words when they related that “digital was everyday” and when they pointed out, “It is not an alien thing, such as a set of computers in a classroom, but embedded into bus journeys and everyday practices” (p. 47).

Reading is not only natural; it is functional on the digital side too. The young people in my study were drawn to digital-based text for purposes that fulfilled functions that were similar to those of traditional print-based text: to seek out topics of interest, to communicate, and to pursue their individual needs. To gravitate to what they needed (intellectual and affective engagement), they accessed a variety of technologies, platforms, and devices that provided inroads for them to socialize, to learn, to solve a problem, and to explore their identity. Similarly, Halliday’s seven functions of language served as a framework to categorize how the young people engaged with digital text. In relation to Halliday’s categories, *instrumental* might be useful as a way to categorize when Ben searched the Internet because of a material need to know how much his iPod touch was worth. When Amelia related the cheat sheet information to her brothers so they could advance in their games, Halliday’s *regulatory* “do as I tell you” (p. 34)

function came into play. Clearly for Reece, Facebook served as a social lifeline and satisfied her communicative needs for the purpose of sustaining friendships, and served the *interactional* function. The *personal* function played out for Juliet on Pinterest, where reading was used to express her individual identity and where her talents for fashion were realized. Halliday described the next three functions as the “non-self side” (p. 31), where the emphasis is on understanding one’s environment, and begins with the *heuristic* function, which refers to reading as a means of learning about things. There are many examples where the participants used reading as a way to learn: For example, Katrina regularly accessed YouTube as a means to learn about her favorite boy band member, and her use exemplifies the heuristic function. The *imaginative* function, described as “a way to create through language a world of [their] own making” (p. 32), served all of the participants when they stepped into their virtual world of gaming. Lastly, Halliday’s *representational* function, or the use of language to convey information, may be seen through Amelia’s maintenance of a friendship through email when she responded to her friends’ questions about her daily life. Without question, digital reading practices served these young people well and fulfilled certain functions in their lives.

Similar to my study, Ito et al. (2008) found that the youths used online networks to extend friendships, explore interests, delve into topics, and seek out specialized knowledge groups. The researchers noted that these activities captured the youths’ attention because “they provide avenues for extending social worlds, self-directed learning, and independence” (p. 1). In their description of youths’ everyday new media practices, Ito and his team presented three genres of participation that described the different forms of commitment, which they called: 1) hanging out; 2) messing around; and 3) geeking out. The three genres of participation the researchers highlighted are similar to what the young people in my study shared about their

everyday digital reading practices in terms of the varied ways reading was purposeful and fulfilled functions in their lives and afforded them opportunities for: imaginative identity-making, learning, intellectual engagement, and social connections.

Amelia's penchant for adventure and the thrill of solving puzzles in her print-text practices was also fulfilled by her gaming pursuits. This finding is consistent with Wilhelm and Smith (2014), who found that "what was true of books was true of games" (p. 42). Specifically in relation to pleasure reading, the researchers noted that their participants described "how they entered a story world in games [which] very much resembled their discussion of their reading" (p. 36). Amelia expressed this concept when she related how reading adventure books was similar to gaming. "You're going places you've never been before, and you can do stuff that you never thought you could do. 'Cause if it's a video game, you do that and in a book you can also do that." This finding demonstrates possible connections with Rosenblatt's theory of reader response and the emphasis on the intellectual and emotional meaning a reader brings to the text. Drawing on Halliday's work, Rosenblatt (2004) says readers' purposes influence how they interact or transact with text. Furthermore, readers' purposes determine how the book is read, experienced, and what readers take from text. Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory emphasized the personal experience and knowledge a reader brings to a text. She posits that readers read both aesthetically (for feeling) and efferently (for information), and the distinction between aesthetic and efferent reading derives ultimately from the stance (which reflects the readers' purpose) the reader adopts and the activities the reader carries out in relation to the text. The focus of efferent reading is on ideas, information, directions or conclusions, or what is to be extracted and retained after the reading event, or what Rosenblatt refers to as the "public tip of the iceberg." The aesthetic covers the other half of the continuum, or the "private side of the

iceberg,” where the readers’ attention is focused on what is being lived through or the feelings during the reading event. Rosenblatt (2004) argued the efferent stance pays more attention to “the cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the qualitative aspects of meaning...” and the aesthetic stance pays more attention to the affective or “the sensuous, the emotive, the qualitative” (p. 1374). She also emphasized that, in reality, readers often move back and forth on the efferent-aesthetic continuum, where some readers may fall near the extremes while others fall closer to the center of the continuum. Within a particular reading, it is also possible to read both efferently and aesthetically, which is what Goodman (1996) alluded to, talking about reading traditional print-based text, when he said, “Some people get pleasure from reading what others read only for information: (cookbooks, travel guides...)” (p.19). And he stated, “Honest, on rare occasions I find a research report or a professional journal article an exciting aesthetic experience” (p. 20). The participants in my study demonstrated similar transactional experiences with digital text when they talked about how the knowledge they gained within the gaming experience itself helped them to take their gaming to another level of exciting virtual play. The image of Reece and Ben while they played *Minecraft* or of Juliet engaged in the multiplayer *Trivador* game especially exemplifies Rosenblatt’s work on the efferent-aesthetic continuum.

Although Rosenblatt did not specifically address the transactions between readers and digital text, possible connections have been made to explore the evolving digital practices of young people today (Berg, 2011; Larson, 2009; Sanders, 2012). Similar to what my findings revealed, Berg (2011) found interesting parallels between traditional print and digital text, with respect to the way adolescents talked about their online gaming practices, that showed similarities to Rosenblatt’s transactional theory. Although the other young people in my study never articulated this connection with Rosenblatt and the link between reading and games in the

direct way Amelia did, they nonetheless demonstrated similar efferent and aesthetic reading response experiences in the video games they chose to play. And like Amelia, they all indicated that the nature of their gaming experiences afforded them similar opportunities to enter a story world, become characters, challenge their intellect, solve problems, be entertained, and learn. In this sense, all of the young people in my study chose digital-based text as they did print-based text, for reasons that were meaningful and fulfilled functions in their lives. Woolsey (2004) highlighted this when she said:

These kids select from the range of technology options as an artist might from a palette, mixing and matching to accomplish their own goals; they don't focus on the technologies, but instead on the activities they want to engage and the goals that they might have set for themselves. (p. 1).

Gee (2010) maintained that artifactual tools mattered because they offered different ways for participation and interaction within different kinds of sociocultural practices. In my study, the young people's extensive use of the Internet, YouTube, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest, afforded them a multitude of opportunities to socialize, to learn, and to connect with friends in both local and global environments. Their digital practices enabled them to search for information, to become knowledgeable, to stay informed on their favourite pop stars, to learn something new, to become expert gamers, to enter other worlds, to join affinity groups, and to participate in communities of practice. Digitized cultures created new possibilities to make meaning, to strengthen their identities and, for the young people in my study, provided a plethora of real-life situated contexts to reflect the culture in which they live. As Berg (2011) explained, "adolescents' online activities do not take place with disembodied strangers but with friends who exist and events that happen in the young person's school and

community.” O’Donnell (1998) pointed out that “our own communities shape who we are no less forcefully, and our technologies give us power to shape those communities” (p. 13).

Reading and Identity

Identity is the process of defining who you are in relation to others. Gee (1996) proposed that individuals have a sort of “identity kit,” which is used to identify oneself and to be recognized as a certain kind of person in a given context. This identity kit, he explained, comes with a set of instructions, referred to as Discourses, which serve to incorporate ways of being in the world and signal individuals’ identities. Discourse is more than just talk or language; it involves distinctive ways of reading and writing, with distinctive ways of acting and interacting, believing, valuing, feeling, and forming allegiance to a certain lifestyle. Individual choices, actions, and values combine with non-human elements such as the various tools and technologies (for example, the iPod touch for my participants) that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network. In enacting and being recognized as being a certain kind of person in the context of different social practices, the young people in my study constructed and shaped their personal and social identities through their choices of text, their social interactions around text, the use of their technological devices, and engagement in online cultures.

To draw on the work of Gee (1996) and his notions of distinctive ways of being in the world, all the young people in my study, apart from Katrina, identified as strong readers, and although Juliet struggled “to get going,” all four had positive reading histories. In comparison to their sixth-grade classmates, in their estimation, Amelia, Reece, and Ben were better readers than most. Wilhelm and Smith (2014) explained that “naming oneself is designed to articulate one’s place in the world” (p. 93). In contrast to the others, Katrina was an outlier in the sense that her

stories of reading were of struggles, avoidance, and tensions with print. She, unlike the others, was less invested in traditional print-based text. Although the young people's sense of self as a certain kind of reader was highly individual, the common ground they shared was in their desire for agency and autonomy, and this was especially evident in their decisions and their clear choices of text. They valued their independence, and they were determined to make their reading their own. They declared their independence in the texts they chose to read and in those they rejected despite the good intentions of significant people in their lives. This finding is consistent with Love and Hamston's (2003) study of 15-year-old boys, who, despite being four years older than my participants, found that a powerful sense of their agency emerged from their decisions about which types of texts to appropriate and which to reject.

The participants in my study chose text that supported their interests, desires, and needs, and that reflected who they are and what was important to them. Reading certain texts also served as a way to enact their identity. Wilhelm and Smith (2014) pointed out that "readers use their reading to name themselves and to differentiate from others" (p. 93). Ben made the distinction that he was a different reader outside of school, as did Amelia, who clearly made certain I knew that "I don't read what my girlfriends read" and thereby positioned herself as a certain kind of reader who reads a certain kind of text. Amelia identified as smart and clever and as someone who loved to be challenged. She habitually engaged in both traditional print and digital texts that provided avenues for her to piece together a puzzle, to solve problems, and to take on new identities. Both Reece and Juliet had an insatiable desire to learn about people and to explore new worlds and multiple perspectives. Ross et al. (2006) pointed out that reading about other people, and their experiences, helps young people understand themselves and their changing place in the world. In the process of defining themselves, the young people in my study

often chose text in order to explore new possible futures. Ross et al. (2006) noted how the narrative experiences found in stories have the power to change their lives and to imagine new possibilities.

Pahl and Rowsell (2012) maintained that “Identity is the filter through which we present ourselves to the world” (p. 119). Katrina generally avoided traditional print-based text outside of school and was a different sort of reader, one who was actively engaged in digital text and was more invested in digital mobile devices. The others read both print and digital text, but these texts often conflicted with their reading in school, not only the print-based texts they valued but also their digital text practices and the tools that were clearly central in their real-life worlds. This disconnect between their in- and out-of-school text practice was glaringly apparent in the stories the young people shared. Gee (2008) explained that people occupy multiple identities depending on the discourse communities they inhabit. The New London Group (1996) theorized that “as people are simultaneously members of multiple lifeworlds, so their identities have multiple layers that are in complex relation to each other” (p. 9). To extend this line of thinking, Pahl and Rowsell (2012) noted that “Children’s texts describe different cultural worlds” (p. 69). This was nowhere as transparent as when the young people in my study were instructed to leave their digital devices at the classroom door. Having to keep their cultural tools concealed from their teachers conjured up Ives’ (2011) metaphor of “hiding in plain sight” (p. 250) and the notion that hidden literacies “go untapped” (p. 250) and are not valued because they are not viewed as appropriate or relevant in relation to “officially sanctioned, school based literacies” (p. 250). Carrington and Robinson (2012) explained that when young people leave their digital technologies behind, they “leave behind an entire suite of competencies, practices, and knowledge about digital technologies and digital text” (p. 2).

Pahl and Rowsell (2012) explained that people's identities cannot be separated from the ways they engage in literate practices. Reading practices are "infused with identity" (Pahl & Rowsell, p 114), and individuals create identity through their social practices. One particularly moving story, where Reece's decision to read the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was thwarted because it was important for her not be perceived by her friends as being weak and in need of improvement, demonstrated how one's identity cannot be separated from their reading practices. Reading was a dominant social practice through which the young people in my study shaped their identities, fostered their relationships, and maintained their close ties with family and friends. They deliberately chose texts and avoided others depending on the relationships they wished to develop and nurture. Knoester (2010) found that "adolescents strategically selected, read, discussed, and avoided literature based on the relationships they hoped to cultivate" (p. 7). In my study, the participants revealed the power school friendships exerted over their reading choices: Reece made the decision to take her book home when her choice of text that was outside of the norm in her social network, and Amelia read what her friends read at school, but not at home. These examples speak to the power of conformity, which Finders (1997) highlighted when she noted that "free choice is not free from the webs of social relationships." (p.5). Finders (1997) reported how in the underlife of the "social queens," group identity often trumped over individual identity, where "allegiance to peer group remained central" (p. 48).

Gee (2008) argued that Discourses involve distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, and believing, and this includes the use of tools and technologies that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a social group. The young people in my study made declarations about who they are and what they value through the use of their various technological mobile devices, specifically their prized iPod touch device, and their participation and engagement in

online cultures and affinity groups. Gee (2003) explained affinity groups as being “a group that is bonded primarily through shared endeavors, goals, and practices” (p. 93). The participants constructed their identities within their social interactions with their families and friends as they engaged in social practices in ways that were meaningful to them and shaped them for their own intentions and needs. Whether they were sitting with their friends playing video games on the bus, posting a Facebook status, clustered around an iPad learning to speak Turkish, exploring MMORPG communities with other gamers, or enacting and imagining new identities on Pinterest, their use of technology was social. Love and Hamston (2003) noted that the youth in their study pursued specific types of print and digital text because they “carried immediate pragmatic and social investment” (p. 161), which contributed to their construction of their identities. Gee (2003) pointed out, “Any specific way of reading and thinking is, in fact, a way of being in the world, a way of being a certain ‘kind of person,’ a way of taking on a certain sort of identity” (p. 73).

The young people in my study shaped and constructed their identities through their everyday social practices as they followed their own reading interests and met their intellectual and affective needs through their purposeful and strategic choice of text, the deliberate ways they engaged with their technological devices and online digital cultures, and their meaningful social interaction with family and friends.

Reading Provides Social-Cultural Capital

“People don’t just read... they do things with these texts” (Gee, 2010, pg. 176) – things that involve more than just reading. They do them with other people as they participate in distinctive social-cultural practices (Gee, 2010). Intrinsic to Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, as Jaramillo (1996) stated, is the notion that “individuals interact with one another in

social situations to socially negotiate meaning” (p. 139). What young readers do with text, what these activities mean to them, and how these texts fit into their everyday lives remain central questions in studies of literacy practices (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). The young people in my study read many types of traditional and digital-based text that provided them important forms of social-cultural capital.

Central to Bourdieu’s (1991) work is the idea that there are different forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Cultural capital, as conceptualized by Bourdieu (1991) and as Kelly (2010) noted, is any form of knowledge, skills, education, or advantage that a person is perceived to hold that will provide him or her with higher status in the community. Bourdieu (1991) maintained that “symbolic capital” is one form of cultural capital, or any accumulated “prestige, reputation, and fame” (p. 230) gained from different social contexts and settings. Economic capital refers to wealth or financial resources, while social capital refers to the interactions that develop in a social network in which a person participates. Blair and Sanford (2004) maintained that social-cultural capital is created by purposeful engagement with and around text in meaningful interactions with and for others. They argued that youth read to acquire greater social-cultural capital, which they gain from the texts they select to read. These researchers pointed out that social-cultural capital is “the relationships buil[t] around information-passing that developed through the shared activities around text,” whether that was through “figuring out how something works, keeping track of sports statistics, or staying connected with friends” (p. 458). They explained that the reading material is used as the “currency” to develop and maintain social connections and strengthen identities. Currency can encompass both print and digital-based reading materials, and it includes a variety of technological cultural tools (such as the iPod touch, iPad, computers, or smartphones). The

participants in my study had a relationship with their iPod and its importance in their lives cannot be underestimated. Gee (2010) argued that artifactual tools are important because they offer different ways for participation and interaction within different kinds of sociocultural practices.

Blair and Sanford (2004) maintained that social networks have inherent value because they transform reading events into social-cultural capital. In my study, many reading events centered on various digital text practices. One reading event that dominated the stories my participants told involved playing their video games with their friends. Gee (2003) maintained that video games are inherently social and provide social capital. It is through these everyday playful pursuits around meaningful text that reading acted as the “bonding agent, the social glue” (Marsh, 2011, p. 113) where relationships were built. Social-cultural capital was accrued through the passing along of useful game tips, needed for intellectual and affective engagement, distribution of their expertise, and communication of valuable knowledge. Through their shared experiences of collaboratively working together, they honed and acquired new skills. As the gamers interacted with each other in varied social contexts to socially negotiate meaning, they gained capital, which then became a valued commodity. The games they played on their various technological devices served as the reading material or currency they used to maintain their friendships, build new alliances, and enact and strengthen their identities. Similarly, Blair and Sanford (2004) gave the example of boys clustered around the computer and explained that it was through “both participating in the event and interacting with their teammates” (p. 458) that the boys in their study shaped their identities and maintained their social connections.

Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris (2008) maintained that youth are motivated to read when it offers them social capital, “in the form of gaining information, ideas for self-improvement, models for identities, or ways to maintain existing relationships and build new

ones” (p. 147). The young people in my study read many different kinds of print and digital-based text inside their social environments, and they looked for opportunities to build social-cultural capital in order to achieve their goals and shape their futures. This finding aligns with Moje et al. (2008), who found that “Social networks, identities, and established goals are key motivators for youth reading outside of school” (p. 148). For the young people in my study, the Internet was a place for strengthening and building social networks and transforming reading events into social-cultural capital. Through their habitual use of the Internet and the various websites and social media platforms they frequented, they built their knowledge, gained useful information, acquired valuable skills, and became experts in the things that mattered to them, which created advantages in the form of cultural capital that helped to elevate their status in the community. Through purposeful engagement around text – such as exploring popular culture, accessing online tutorials for cheat sheets, searching for the lyrics to songs, streaming their news feed on Facebook for information, or staying connected with friends – they met their particular goals and built social-cultural capital. Through these relationship-building activities built around information-passing, as Blair and Sanford (2004) highlighted, “they shape[d] visions of their future selves” (p. 458).

The young people in my study purposefully select various kinds of print and digital text in a self-directed and deliberate way and read texts that offered them social-cultural capital in the form of gaining knowledge, identity construction, self-improvement, and building and maintaining social connections. In this sense, my findings are consistent with other studies (Blair & Sanford, 2003; Kelly, 2010; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008) that address reading from a sociocultural perspective and conclude that young people “read inside social networks”

(Moje, et al., 2008, p. 148) to acquire social-cultural capital which they gain from the texts they select to read.

iPod as Artifact and Cultural Practice

“Artifacts bring in everyday life. They are material and they represent culture” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 1). Just as Carrington’s young participant’s iPhone was more than just a phone but a technological artifact of culture (Carrington, 2012) “in the construction of her everyday realities and the textual practices that emerge[d] around this interaction” (p. 27), the iPod touch was more than just a device to play music, text, or play video games for my participants. It was a valuable meaning-making tool in the socially situated contexts in the lives of the young people in my study. Gee (2010) argued that artifactual tools were important because they offered different ways for participation and interaction within different kinds of sociocultural practices. Gee (2010) maintained that mediational tools were important in that they served for “giving and getting meaning and involved ways of acting, interacting, valuing, and believing and knowing” (p. 172). The tools offered particular affordances in the exploration of self, “that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (p. 158). Gee’s (1996) notion of Discourse was particularly useful in my analysis because it served to illuminate the significance of the iPod as a cultural tool and to identify the owner as a certain kind of person engaging in certain kinds of sociocultural practices. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) stressed that “artifacts and identities are intertwined” (p. 8) and as such represent who individuals are. They further argued that “artifacts let in new kinds of identities” (p. 71).

For the consumer, the iPod touch is described as a multifunctional handheld electronic device marketed by Apple Inc. that features a camera and allows users to download or upload content, play music, browse the Internet, buy software (game apps), and send and receive email.

However, in the lives of the young people in my study, its function served as a valuable tool to create their cultural and social identities, and its significance therefore cannot be underrated. As a cultural tool that rarely left their side, or as van Hooft (2009) noted, “always-on-you-technology” (p. 437), the iPod offered prestige and status for a sixth-grader. Ben articulated its value thus: “You either have one or you want one.” This sentiment is akin to what Bourdieu (1991) conceptualized as “symbolic capital” in the sense that the iPod touch presented the owner with a great deal of prestige and honour. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) pointed out, “Artifacts are instruments that can lever power” (p. 70), and, “It [artifacts] may not have value in the outside world, but within everyday lives, it symbolizes and represents relationships and events that matter” (p. 1). As Amelia put it, “It [the iPod] has everything I need.”

In their everyday lives, the iPod touch device was a valuable social artifact, object, and digital tool that provided many opportunities to share common interests, to stay connected with friends through texting (the Kik app) and various social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram), or to participate in a shared passion – playing video games with their friends – which enabled them to access affinity groups and participate in social networks. As an object of desire, the iPod touch became a dominant social practice, and many “literacy events” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1993) revolved around its different uses. It is easy, then, to assume that for Juliet to not own one had social consequences. This finding also raises the issue of children's reliance on what Marsh (2011) called “family digital capital” (p. 110) to ensure access to digital tools. Juliet's mother provided her with digital capital involving access and skills to use Facebook and Pinterest on their home computer, but Juliet did not have an iPod touch so she was unable to participate with peers in such activities as playing video games, sending texts, or checking Facebook posts during the day, when she was at school. Such peer-related activities, according to

Blair and Sanford (2004) help young adolescents to secure their status and, “to position themselves in their world” (p. 459). As a social-cultural practice, the iPod touch device became the “currency” the young people used to maintain and sustain their friendships and, just as Blair and Sanford (2004) and Kelly (2010) found in their studies of boys’ literacy practices, was a way to shape and enact their individual identities. Through their everyday reading practices, the young people in my study were able to build social-cultural capital and maintain their social connections. In this sense, the iPod touch was a valuable and meaningful cultural artifact in their lives in a similar way as Carrington (2005) found in her study with Roxie, where her iPhone was “clearly important in the dynamics of her everyday life world” (p. 37).

Medium Matters

Just because young people may have access to the tools of their culture, it does not mean they choose to use them all the time for all purposes. The participants in my study selected tools that best suited their interests and needs, and they chose the medium that provided the more satisfying and natural experience for them. Regardless of the affordances a particular medium offered, they were not easily influenced by popular hype and, instead, made their own informed decisions based on what worked for them in the circumstance.

In a recent CBC broadcast of *Cross Country Checkup* (April 7, 2013), on “The Future of the Book,” Rex Murphy asked the question, “Does the book have a future in a digital age?” With the proliferation of digital reading devices for texts, better known as e-readers or e-books and new electronic devices such as the Amazon Kindle, Chapter’s Kobo, and the numerous tablets for reading, such as Apple’s iPad, the question is whether young people today, who were born into the digital world, are more intrigued by the affordances these devices offer over the traditional print-based book, particularly due to the enticing capabilities that include audio,

animation, photographs, video, and interactivity. With features that enable the reader to turn pages with a swipe of a finger, bookmark a location, use a built-in dictionary, and adjust font, size, and brightness, the question begs to be asked: How can e-readers not prove to be appealing? Given that Amazon now generates more e-books than printed books (Maynard, 2010), is it just a matter of time before young people today acquiesce to these technologies as their preferred method for reading?

My study revealed unexpected findings given my preconceived notions of the current generations' penchant for all things technological and their attachment to their digital devices. Because their daily lives are embedded in a world of technologies and mediated by digital and electronic devices, I was surprised to learn they preferred Gutenberg's 15th-century invention, the printed text, and chose the "old-fashioned" codex book over artifacts of their own culture, specifically the e-reader, when reading for recreation. Perhaps their experiences were akin to those of Manguel (1996), who explained, "My hands, choosing a book to take to bed...I consider the form as much as the content" (p. 125), and then, when Manguel talked about his pleasant encounters with books:

At different times and in different places I have come to expect certain books to look a certain way, and, as in all fashions, these changing features fix a precise quality onto a book's definition. I judge a book by its cover; I judge a book by its shape (p. 125).

When the participants were asked about their experiences with an e-reader, Amelia articulated her preference when she said, "Technology is fun to play with and good to read, but sometimes you just want the book." The other participants were just as vocal about the merits of the traditional book format and voiced similar sentiments about books' appeal. Only Reece and Amelia were drawn to the appealing features of the e-reader and appreciated it for its "coolness"

factor. Although Amelia was initially enticed by all its interactive features, the novelty soon wore off when she came to the realization that she still liked the feel of the book better. Reece was the only one of five who indicated she would be likely to continue to use her mother's Kindle e-reader.

The finding that my participants preferred the traditional print over digital text and in particular the e-reader is consistent with Maynard (2010), who expressed similar findings in her small pilot study exploring the impact of the e-reader on younger children's reading habits. Although the six children aged 7 to 12 were intrigued by the affordances of the Kindle e-reader, such as downloading pictures, and the interactive features, the children were not unanimous in adopting it over the traditional print-based text. When they were asked whether they preferred printed or electronic books, Maynard said, "The children were more ambivalent, with half preferring electronic books" (p. 236). Similar findings were expressed by Mackey (2007) in her longitudinal study where she explored young people's encounters with various text formats, with sixteen children aged 10 and 14. Although the e-reader was still in its infancy, Mackey found the children in her study were "fairly dismissive of the electronic book" (p. 36). Interestingly, they offered similar reasons for resisting the e-reader and sticking with the "old fashioned" book as my participants offered: "I'd rather have the book because it seems cozier almost." One participant, Jack, reiterated my participants' sentiments:

It's convenient. I don't think it's a great way of reading and learning, though I mean, it is great. I wouldn't use it. I prefer the book. I don't know why. This is amazing, it has so many functions and you can like put notes and bookmarks, but I like a book. (p. 57).

According to a recent study entitled, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today" conducted by National Literacy Trust (2012), the e-reader may not be used as extensively as one

would presume. In their study of nearly 21,000 young people aged 8 to 16, the researchers found that 72.9% of young people reported they read paper-based materials, but only 8.8% of young people reported they read using a Kindle e-reader digital device.

Two recent articles published in the *Edmonton Journal* speak to the resilience of the printed book. In the first (November 14, 2014), “The future of book publishing is looking good,” Doherty quotes the literacy agent Andrew Wylie, who said, “For all the brouhaha over e-books, they’re disposable: We always return to old-fashioned books.” In the second (December 20, 2014), “Printed books: E-book revolution petering out,” the unnamed writer quotes the founder of a bookstore chain, Tim Waterstone, who said, “People’s love for print books is immovably strong.” Murphy (April 7, 2013) called the current period in book history “a churn” and reminded readers that “we have been vetted to the book for 3-5,000 years of interaction and because it’s been central for so long, it is not going to dissipate that easily.” Prominent book historian and Director of the Harvard Library, Robert Darnton (2009), agreed: “The electronic book will act as a supplement to, not substitute for, Gutenberg’s great machine” (p. 77). Like Murphy, Darnton (September 29, 2014) doubts the book is dead, although he acknowledged that the book has not had an easy life. According to Darnton (November, 26, 2012), the traditional book is not being replaced by the new technology, but instead it is very much alive and will continue to thrive.

The young people in my study were attached to the traditional page-turner format and reported, as others have, that their engagement with the book was a more satisfying and positive experience than their engagement with digital texts and the e-reader in particular. Reading in this way was a more natural way to read for them. To answer Murphy’s (April, 7, 2013) question, “Does the book have a future in a digital age?” as far as the particular “digital natives” (Prensky,

2001a) in my study were concerned, the answer is a resounding “yes.” At least for now, the “old-fashioned” codex prevailed.

Implications for Action – “Opening New Spaces”

As societal expectations for literacy change, and as the demands of literate functions in a society change, so too must definitions of literacy change to reflect this moving target.

(Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004, p. 1584)

The findings of my study of early adolescent students’ perceptions on their reading in new times present a number of important implications for a teaching practice in 21st-century classrooms. Based on my findings, three major implications emerge: 1) Rip open “old” notions of what constitutes text; 2) Create spaces in classroom settings for conversations about reading; and 3) Design reading environments that appeal to the digital reality of young people today.

Societal Perceptions of Reading

To foster a culture of reading in the 21st century, it is imperative that educators challenge and re-evaluate old notions of what constitutes legitimate text and adopt what Ross et al. (2006) argued is a more “generous and inclusive view” (p. 34) when they speak about text, specifically including digital technologies across diverse media platforms. Carrington and Robinson (2012) reminded readers that “it was not so very long ago we would only have been discussing printed forms of text when we spoke about textual landscape.” In contemporary societies, as they pointed out, “we must now include texts created via digital technologies when we speak of the texts that cocoon us in our everyday lives” (p. 1). Furthermore, they drew attention to the need to redefine text:

Limitations of schooled conceptions of literacy both in the UK and elsewhere, as predominantly skills led and paper based need to be expanded to systematically and

consistently include digital texts, since these increasingly dominate in the wider sphere beyond classrooms, constituting the fabric of many people's social lives (p. 31).

Ross et al. (2006) pointed out "We need to pay attention to the multimedia texts that young people use and to the ways in which they use them" (p. 118). When reading is considered to encompass a wide range of texts, both traditional and digital, then perhaps the media, literature, parents, teachers, and, more importantly, young people themselves, will realize that a great deal of their everyday activities constitute reading. Educators need to recognize that young people have multiple reading identities that extend beyond the classroom walls, and when they acknowledge this, they will have a more nuanced understanding of readers in contemporary society. Furthermore, young people will be more likely to develop positive reading identities when their multimodal text practices are valued by their teachers.

Classroom practice. An example of how engaging in conversations with young people about their reading practices could be constructive comes from Ben, when he was asked why it would be helpful for his teacher to know about his personal reading interests. He said, "That might inform what she picks." As my findings revealed, however, conversations about out-of-school reading between the teachers and their students rarely took place. Wilhelm and Smith (2014) asked, "How can we know what texts will bring our students the most pleasure? Well, we can't." (p. 185). Juliet's comments bring to the forefront the importance of having conversations on the topic of students' reading interests, when she commented that her teacher might want to know "that I like stories. All types of books but mostly diaries." Wilhelm and Smith (2014) also highlighted the old adage, "By your students you'll get taught? You will if you let them" (p. 184). Prensky (2012) addressed the importance of teachers really listening to students' opinions about matters that affect their lives when he articulated, "One of the strangest things in the age of

young people's empowerment is how little input our students have into their own education and its future" (p. 2061). Pahl and Rowsell (2012) point out that, "home literacy practices can remain invisible to schools, unless there is time to listen to them" (p. 56). By taking an interest in young people's reading and opening up spaces for discussions, where they can share their reading practices, teachers can learn what young people are reading, what motivates them to read, what they find meaningful, and what gives them pleasure. If the goal of literacy instruction is to foster a lifelong love of reading, then too, there are implications for schools systems to respond to the need for teacher-librarians in school settings, because they, just like classroom teachers, have an important role in promoting reading and digital and print text, and creating an environment where children can talk about their reading interests outside of school. Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer (2006), however, caution that "we not privilege traditional print literacy" (p. 122), but that we instead ask young people "what they are watching at the cinema, what they are playing and trading, what they are browsing and surfing" (p. 122). Ross and colleagues maintained that when teachers provide spaces for students to talk about their out-of-school interests, "without a doubt, it will involve some kind of reading across diverse media" (p. 122).

The value of creating spaces where teachers and young people come together to engage in conversations about their out-of-school reading practices, especially their engagement with digital text and their online popular media cultures, cannot be underestimated. McKenna (2012) suggested, "Learning about the literacy practices in those hidden worlds might yield useful lessons for designing more engaging classroom applications" (p. 301). He also suggested, "It might also produce insights into how teachers can modify their instruction to take advantage of the kinds of activities their students find engaging outside the classroom" (p. 301). Teachers would benefit from understanding the importance of choice to young people and recognizing the

various ways that young people today use reading in their everyday lives that is not necessarily tied to print. Teachers will be better able to connect with their students if they can incorporate teaching pedagogies that draw on a range of multimedia texts and encompass the digital technologies that reflect young people's contemporary reading practices.

Teaching practice. Today's technologically savvy "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001a) are often stuck in traditional print-based text dominated classrooms (Burn, Buckingham, Parry, & Powell, 2010). In order to be more relevant to the needs and experiences of digital natives, teachers must design reading environments that appeal to the digital reality of young people today, and they must incorporate the digital mobile devices they bring to school. Wohlwend (2010) points out that, rather than restricting the use of digital devices and having students check them at the classroom door, teachers should encourage students to bring their "cultural tools" into the classroom. Unfortunately, as Carrington and Robinson (2012) explained, "In many classrooms these devices and the texts produced with them are still perceived to be irrelevant, and even dangerous, in relation to children's learning and their development of powerful practices with text" (p. 2). Ladbroke (2008) raised the point that many teachers find it challenging to include digital devices in the classroom mainly because of "their ideas of what constitutes useful text for literacy gain" (p. 80). Wohlwend (2010) suggested that technology is too often viewed as "an accessory for entertainment or supplemental activities, while the official curriculum is delivered through traditional paper-and-pencil activities." (p. 146).

The problem when schools limit the reading curriculum to print-based text is "that our children will be [well] prepared for 1950 but ill prepared for 2050" (Baker, Pearson, & Rozebald, 2010, p. 2). When the young people in my study talked about their digital devices in the school setting, namely their iPod touch, they spoke about the restrictions and rules placed on their use.

Although their devices were allowed in the school and during breaks, any devices that were visible in the classroom during instructional time were confiscated. Carrington and Robinson (2012) discovered and reported on this reality. They wrote that “an increasing number of the children and young people walking through the school gates each morning are required to leave behind an entire suite of competencies, practices, and knowledge about digital technologies and digital text”(p. 2). From their perspective, “Students are required to shift from a world replete with multimodal text, remixing and mashing, and fluid novice-expert relations, to a relatively unidimensional formalized context centered upon only one form of static text and structured by particular adult-child authority and knowledge hierarchies” (p. 2). This does not mean, as Carrington and Robinson (2012) pointed out, that educators need to put aside the traditional print-based texts, but that “children and young people require a *both/and* approach to print and digital text...Multimodal texts are neither print nor entirely digital” (p. 3). They advocated for classrooms in the 21st century to be “places where digital and print literacies come together to allow children opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes they will need to navigate complex urban sites and social forms” (p 3). Wohlwend (2010) advocated for policies “that remove institutional barriers and actively support a permeable literacy curriculum that encourages young children to bring their cultural resources to school, including digital technologies and popular media” (p. 150). Educators must recognize the importance of acknowledging young people’s funds of knowledge and build upon the various resources they bring to school.

Although removing institutional barriers and incorporating digital literacy practices may seem simple, Honan (2012) espoused the importance of engaging in conversations with students about the educational affordances provided by digital technologies before incorporating digital

texts in the literacy curriculum. Before thinking about “crossing boundaries” between “industrial and cyber mindsets” (p. 95), teachers need to first ask and reflect upon the obvious questions:

- 1) What do you know about your students’ engagement with digital texts outside of the classroom?
- 2) What is ‘new’ about the literacy practices we are using with these ‘new’ technologies? and
- 3) Is it possible to change classroom practice so that the ways in which children learn in digital contexts are encouraged? (p. 95)

She pointed out that this process of thinking about the educational affordances provided by digital technologies is necessary and that teachers will find it to be helpful when they design reading environments that appeal to the digital realities of students today. She argued, “It is this re-thinking that is required if schools and teachers are going to engage in meaningful and successful ways with digital texts in their literacy classrooms” (p. 95). With respect to the affordances of gaming in the reading classroom, Sanders (2012) argued that “language arts classrooms should consider incorporating games as texts because they actually are texts – texts readers can transact with” (p. 5). Ladbrook (2008) pointed out that “if we believe in a social constructivist model of education and view texts as cultural tools, then cognizance needs to be taken of the out-of-school digital reading interests of students” (p. 81). Evans (2005) reiterated similar sentiments:

As educators we need to be increasingly aware of the new and different ‘worlds’ that our children are experiencing – worlds that reflect their social practices and cultures and their day-to-day life. We need to work collaboratively with them in a way that allows us to bridge the gap between the many dynamic, constantly changing worlds in which they

live; and the older world that is still in existence for many adults – a static world that is seen as an immutable, almost permanent edifice to the twentieth century. To do this we need to find out about, show interest in, and appreciate that children’s popular culture interests, their technological expertise, indeed their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991); are valued in an attempt to make school, currently a legal obligation in most countries of the world, more meaningful for them. (p. 10)

It is my intention that the implications highlighted above provide new ideas for helpful action that will inform theory and practice as well as inspire policy makers and literacy educators in the area of reading instruction in the elementary school setting to move forward to reflect the world young people inhabit today in order to make their literacy teaching practices relevant and engaging for contemporary students.

Recommendations for Further Research

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) maintained, “There is nothing that does not need further research” (p. 195). As with most interpretive inquiries, the findings in my study raise new questions related to the fundamental question: How do young people engage in text in the context of their own time as a situated social practice? Since young people’s lives are consumed by and entrenched in digital technologies, a future research area worth exploring would be to continue to examine the rich online and digital textual practices of young people in their everyday lives, especially the voices of early adolescent boys, which I feel may have been unrepresented in the current study. Future studies would benefit from a closer examination of young people’s relationship with cultural technological artifactual tools, such as an iPod touch device, tablet, or smartphone, in an effort to learn more about the value these artifacts hold for

them. This line of research would lead to learning more about their educational affordances and benefits as reading tools in the elementary school classroom.

In order to continue to foster and nurture a lifelong love of reading in all its textual forms, and in order to address the apparent disconnect in terms of young people's reading practices in and out of school, there is a need for ongoing research that addresses the importance of the participants' voices in matters that affect their reading lives, in and out of school. A topic for future research could be to continue to explore in more depth the different pleasures young people get out of what they read. In light of the many distractions with which young people are faced in their everyday lives, it would be helpful to understand what value reading brings to young people today. The kinds of texts young people are reading and when, why, with whom, and for what purposes are worth further investigation, especially with children and early adolescent students in grades (4-6), as this is the age when research says that young people turn away from reading. Some important research in this area has already recently been done by Wilhelm and Smith (2014), with adolescents, and it is worth further exploration. These researchers conceptualized how notions of pleasures (play, work, intellectual, and social) in reading played out with young, committed readers, and they reported this in their book *Reading Unbound: Why kids need to read what they want and why we should let them*. Their study provided powerful insights into why young people gravitate to certain texts, their experiences with these texts, and how they use them, which, they concluded, might be helpful for parents and teachers to know.

Reflections on the Research Experience

In chapter three, I provided a detailed description of the methodological procedures, while here I highlight some of my thoughts and considerations during the research process.

Engaging in this research study as a researcher and learner has been a transformative experience. Throughout the study, I gained more than a deeper understanding and appreciation for the inquiry process, for through this lived research experience, as a co-constructor of knowledge with the participants, I gained invaluable insights into the constructivist paradigm. It is through this active engagement with others, through collective, creative meaning-making activities where knowledge is constructed culturally and historically, that I came to understand the five young people's experiences of reading in their everyday lives. Conducting this study also confirmed my strong belief in the importance of engaging in ongoing conversations with young people and the need for creating spaces for their voices to be heard about matters that affect their lives. As I reflect upon the research experience and the personal and practical knowledge that it has afforded me, I am reminded of Ellis (2006), who said that, in conducting inquiry research, I will be "changed by the research and find personal meaning in the narrative inquiry experience" (p. 43).

In reflecting on the research experience, I learned that the interpretive inquiry process is not easy, nor is it simple, because no matter how prepared you think you are to conduct the study, you find out it is "rarely neat and linear" (Mayan, 2009, p. 12). It is time consuming, messy, and can never be rushed, especially when conducting research with young children about their varied reading practices. When reading is viewed as embodied action, it can never be explored detached from everyday life, and therefore time is required to examine the complex relations that exist. Although it is time consuming, the silver lining of interpretive inquiry, as Mayan (2009) pointed out, is that "taking risks, exploring new ground, and managing the unpredictable nature of qualitative research can produce rich and important knowledge about our social world" (Mayan, 2009, p. 12).

In my own research, reflexivity played out in my constant attention to the details of the research process from the moment it was conceived to the critical decisions I made along the way as a co-constructor of knowledge and meaning-making with the five young people in my study. Even though Mayan (2009) says, “There is no reflexivity checklist to ensure I did it right” (p. 138), I was comforted in knowing that although reflexivity is a “complex undertaking” (Finlay, 2002, p. 535), we all practice some form of reflexivity because as human beings we are reflexive by nature, and that is what makes us human (Mayan, 2009). During the initial entry phase of obtaining access and permission, I came to understand that the recruitment process takes time and, as Rossman and Rallis (2003) explained, “seldom happens quickly and smoothly” (p. 155). Looking back, I am not sure what I could have done differently to make the recruitment process more efficient. I wonder whether some parents were uncomfortable with the home literacy dig or, maybe, whether many children this age are simply not eager to share this aspect of their lives.

Not only did the recruitment phase take longer than I anticipated, I quickly discovered what Roberts (2010) pointed out: “Data collection always takes longer than you realize” (p. 158). Although I had planned for four, possibly five interviews with the children, I learned that, as part of the inquiry process of the hermeneutic circle, one cannot rush conversations, if one is genuinely concerned about the participants and the richness of their experiences. As a researcher in the role of “stranger,” it took time for the participants in their role as “teacher” to teach me everything they wanted me to know and to show me what they cared about, what they found important, and what they valued. As I moved into the data analysis phase of my study, I felt much as Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described: “An empty feeling comes over you as you ask,

‘Now what do I do’” (pg. 165)? Halcolm’s *Iron Laws of Evaluation Research*, as cited in Patton (2002), reflected my tensions at the time:

The moment you begin analysis it will become perfectly clear to you that you’re missing the most important pieces of information and that without those pieces of information there is absolutely no hope of making any sense out of what you have. (p. 431)

In the process, I learned this tension is not unusual and it does happen in qualitative inquiry when one’s intention is to gain a deeper understanding of what he or she wishes to explore. Ellis (1998b) writes, “In this process it is just as important to ask what is absent in the data as what is present” (p. 27). As I reflect on this stage, I am not sure whether I panicked or whether I thought there were gaps in my data, or a bit of both, but regardless, the decision to meet with my participants one last time in June was the right one because it permitted me to pick up the loose threads and bring about a resolution to my data collection process. Patton (2002) says, “Once analysis and writing are under way, fieldwork may not be over. On occasion gaps or ambiguities found during analysis cry out for more data collection...” (p. 437). Halcolm’s *Iron Laws of Evaluation Research* (in Patton, 2002) summarized my thinking during this next phase of analysis, and for the dilemma I then faced:

Analysis brings moments of terror that nothing sensible will emerge and times of exhilaration from the certainty of having discovered ultimate truth. In between are long periods of hard work, deep thinking, and weight-lifting volumes of material. (p. 431)

It was in this stage of trying to reduce the codes to something manageable, and in my attempts to look for and discover patterns, that Ellis (1998b) had the greatest influence on me. She stated, “One has to believe that patterns or relationships remain to be discovered, and one has to search for the coherence and reasonableness in the behavior of others” (p. 2). Although I was initially

overwhelmed with the enormity of the task of collecting and analyzing the data, and then later in writing the dissertation, the journey through this process enabled me to gain invaluable insights and new understandings in the construction of my own knowledge about young people's reading practices, and, through this process, my hope was to bring about change and to advance the knowledge in the field.

Looking back on the research process as a whole, I believe the interpretive inquiry approach enabled me to answer the practical and concerned questions that directed my inquiry. What I would do differently in the future, however, would be to include a group interview as a method of data collection. From my experiences of learning from a social constructivist perspective, bringing early adolescents together to discuss a topic has the potential for lively conversations and rich, descriptive data. This type of group social interaction could have offered the five young people in my study an opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences while they listened to the responses and views of others, and it could have provided them another venue to reveal themselves as readers. As a data collection method, a group interview may have added additional valuable insights and generated new questions about the interest of my study.

My study describes and analyzes the experiences of five early adolescent students to whom I owe my profound gratitude and whose generosity in sharing their lives and stories allowed me a glimpse into the world in which they inhabit. Although I had every expectation that the young people would be fascinating individuals in their own right, I also found them to be exceptionally delightful, not to mention intelligent, witty, and insightful. I was pleasantly surprised by how savvy, self-confident, and determined they were in relation to all aspects of their reading lives. It was refreshingly wonderful to see their young minds' empowered sense of identity as they voiced their thoughts and shared insights about themselves as readers and about

reading in general. Thinking about my experiences with them made me reflect upon the importance of creating space for young people's voices to be heard, because they have a great deal to teach us. Young people, as my findings revealed, however, are not often asked directly, nor do they often have the opportunity to reflect upon or to vocalize their thoughts about their reading. This unfortunate circumstance was especially apparent with Ben when he kept reiterating that he had not often thought about something I had asked him. It is by listening to their stories of reading that we let them know that their views, thoughts, and opinions are valuable and worthwhile. It is my sincere hope that, through my words and interpretations, I was able to represent their voices to show who they are and what is important to them as young readers in the 21st century. For me, the time "in the field" consequently was a pleasurable, enjoyable, and personally satisfying research experience. Contributing to this positive experience was the relationship I built with the principal and the office staff, who welcomed me into their school and made every effort to provide a space where I could conduct my research in privacy. The two participating teachers were generous in their time and made every concession needed to make it easy for the young people to participate in the study, which, in turn, made the whole research experience very enjoyable for all of us. I am immensely grateful to Amelia, Reece, Katrina, Ben, and Juliet for all they have taught me about reading in the sociocultural world in which they live, and especially to Juliet who led me to Pinterest and a whole new world of reading pleasures.

This research has also been transformative in the sense that it has made me reflect upon my own work as a teacher, literacy consultant, researcher, and in my most recent role, to re-examine my approach to undergraduate teaching with pre-service teachers as they prepare to teach reading in the second decade of the 21st-century elementary classroom. It is my sincere

hope that my study findings will inspire pre-service and practicing teachers to reflect upon their own teaching pedagogy, as they design their reading classrooms, so that they might reflect the types of multimedia texts and practices young people find engaging in reading contexts outside of the school.

Conclusion

I embarked on this research journey with the intention to explore early adolescent students' reading from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) with an expanded view of what constitutes reading, in order to expand our knowledge of the reading experiences of young people in order to more accurately reflect the life worlds and realities of early adolescents today. Through the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, I learned that these five young people engaged in a multitude of texts for a variety of purposes that were meaningful, deeply personal, and fulfilled functions in their everyday lives (Halliday, 1969). Their stories further supported the driving principle which emphasizes the importance of culture, history and social context underlying my study and also reflected the key tenets of New Literacy Studies (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993), which posit that reading is a socially situated practice embedded in everyday life. Although I was not surprised the five young people engaged in varied multimodal textual practices, the nature of those practices, their importance, the varied forms and medium they took, the importance of choice, what they valued, and the significance of their cultural artifacts added richness and depth to my understanding of young people's reading practices in contemporary society. What was glaringly evident is the apparent disconnect between their in- and out-of-school textual practices.

I hope this study also draws attention to the need to continue the conversation about what constitutes reading in a culture infused with rapidly changing literacies, so that we might think

carefully about the message we send to students about the value of their out-of-school reading practices. Educators need to acknowledge that what constitutes reading is constantly changing, and they need to recognize the various ways that young people today use reading in their everyday lives, which are not necessarily tied to traditional print-based text. An obvious and important contribution in this study is that reading is natural and it is functional on the digital side, too. And, therefore, there is no cause for this perception of a disinterest in reading to prevail. This perception comes from an outsider's perspective that does not value the kinds of reading young people value and practice. Early adolescent students in my study read more than most people realize, and they read more than they even realize. From their rich and storied lives, reading for these young people is meaningful, purposeful, and relevant in the context of their time. This study presents the interpretive accounts of the stories of five young sixth-graders, one boy and four girls, and although their stories are insightful, it does not end here. It is instead, as Ellis (1998a) pointed out, an invitation "for more hopeful beginnings for new stories" (p. 10).

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APPENDIX A: NOTIFICATION APPROVAL

Date: October 4, 2012
 Study ID: Pro00028473
 Principal Investigator: [Vera Janjic-Watrich](#)
 Study Supervisor: [Carol Leroy](#)
 Study Title: Reading in New Times: Elementary Students' Perspectives
 Approval Expiry Date: October 3, 2013

Approved Consent Form:	Approval Date	Approved Document
	10/4/2012	Consent Form Teacher
	10/4/2012	Consent Form Parent and Child

Sponsor/Funding Agency:	SSHRC - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council	SSHRC
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Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1 . Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

William Dunn, PhD
 Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Pre-Interview Activity

1. Draw a picture of a special time when you were reading. Include any key words or cartoon-style thoughts or speech bubbles about the activity you were engaged in.
2. Draw a picture that represents a space or place where you enjoy reading. Use key words or a legend to describe what happens in that space or place or label parts of the place.
3. Make a schedule of your day or week to show how you spend your time outside of school. Use colors to code it and use a legend.
4. Make a diagram to show who or what supports you in your reading.
5. Draw two pictures showing a good day when you were reading and one of a bad day when you were reading.
6. Draw a timeline indicating your reading habits and reading interests over time.
7. Complete this sentence: Reading is like...
8. Make a list of 20 important key words when you think about your experience of being a reader.
9. Draw two pictures showing your different experiences of reading in school.

Student Interview #1

Explain that the questions are a way that I can get to know you as a person and what it is like to be your age. The questions will help you to recall significant memories and ideas and to help you think and talk about the topic. I have many questions – some of them might work well to help you think of things to tell me about, and some might not, and that is okay.

1. If you had to go to school only 3 days a week, what are some things you'd like to do with your extra time?
2. What's the best thing about being your age? What's the hardest thing about being your age?
3. Have you ever done anything really different from what most people your age have done, or made something, read up on something, planned something, or tried something?
4. In all the things you are interested in or you've thought about a lot, what has puzzled you the most?

5. What's the most difficult thing you've ever had to do, or is there something you've done that was really hard to do but you really wanted to do it?

6. Do you ever get other people to go along with your ideas or what you want to do? What about in activities with friends or activities or routines at home?

Student Interview #2

1. Can you describe a typical weekend?

2. Can you finish this sentence: I'm happiest when...

3. Can you recall something that you read that was wonderful? What was it? Why was it wonderful? Where were you?

4. What is the best thing about reading?

5. How important is reading in your everyday life? Can you give some examples?

6. Can you tell me about a particularly special time when you were reading? Where were you? What happened? Why was it special? Were you with anyone?

7. How have your experiences of reading changed over the last few years? How are they the same? How are they different?

8. Who or what influences what you read and the ways you read?

9. What do the people around you say about what you read and the ways you read?

10. If you could read anything you want in the ways you want to, what would that be? How about in the future?

11. If you were in charge of the reading program at school, what would it be like? What would you do that is different than in school?

12. How does your teacher encourage you to read? What does she say or do?

13. What would you like your teacher to know about you when it comes to reading?

14. What would you like your parents to know about what's important to you when it comes to reading?

15. How do your friends influence what you read and the different ways you read?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE PARENTS

1. Can you describe your child's history as a reader? What changes have you observed over time?
2. Some people express concern that children these days don't read as much as they should. Have you ever thought this might apply to your child? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe your child's engagement in reading – Avid reader/Reluctant reader/Average? Please explain.
4. What do you think of your child's reading habits? Do you see her/him as reading a lot? Not enough? Do you wish she/he would read more/less?
5. Can you recall a time when your child was excited about reading something? What was she/he reading? Where was she/he? Why was she/he excited?
6. Is there anything else you want to tell me that you want me to know about your child and their reading practices?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE TEACHERS

The focus of the Teacher Interview is to provide a **concrete description** of the community that the student participants' live in and learn in – description of town, school community, school, and classes

It is to provide the setting for the study and specifically about the demographics. It is also a description of what a typical day looks like, the organization of the day and the structure of the student participants' timetable (time frame, schedule, recess/breaks, teachers, subject areas, etc.).

Interview – Teacher 1

1. Tell me about the **town** – the demographics. (for example: the size, industry, population, ethnicity, lifestyle, economic levels, educational levels, political climate, culture, leisure activities for young/adults, and overall feel of the community).
2. Tell me about the **school community**? (part of larger school district, parent connection/involvement, extra-curricular activities/clubs leadership opportunities offered, parent/teacher collaboration).
3. Tell me about the **school** (school goals, school events, monthly/weekly incentives, programs, library, technology).
4. Tell me about the structure of the **class and what the students' day looks like**. (timetable, teachers, subjects, gender ratio, class dynamics).
5. Do you consider _____ to be an avid reader? What makes you think that?
6. Is there anything else you want to tell me that you want me to know?

Interview – Teacher 2

1. Tell me about your **Language Arts Program**? Can you describe your Language Arts Program?
2. What does a typical day/week look like in your Language Arts Program?
3. Tell me about the Library (organization) and the Library Program and describe what library looks like for Grade 6 students (schedule, procedure)?
4. Do you consider _____ to be avid reader? What makes you think that?
5. Is there anything else you want to tell me that you want me to know?

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