

THE POWER OF CHOICE:
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A FREE CHOICE READING PROGRAM
IN AN EIGHTH-GRADE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Abstract

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Many of the titles on contemporary middle school reading lists across the country fail to appeal to the interests of today's adolescents. Oftentimes, this shortfall negatively affects students' attitudes toward reading and voluntary reading behaviors. A review of relevant research points to the incorporation of choice as a source of motivation and engagement for middle schoolers' reading apathy. In this mixed-method study, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of several surveys administered at the conclusion of two reading units; one in which all students read the same assigned text and another in which students chose their own text; examines changes in the reading attitudes and behaviors in 57 students following the implementation of a free choice reading program in an eighth-grade English classroom. The quantitative analysis of the Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scales revealed a positive correlation between the implementation of the free choice program and increased student reading attitudes, particularly among female students. Voluntary reading behaviors, as measured by the Reading Behavior Profile and student-completed reading records of non-school-related reading, however, did not increase as a result of the free choice unit. The results of this study reveal that while the implementation of a free choice reading program may not increase the reading attitudes and behaviors of all middle school students, the incorporation of choice into the reading curriculum can have a positive impact upon select students and groups and is therefore worthy of a place in the middle school English classroom.

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Introduction

Have you ever “gotten lost” in a good book? The best books create stories and characters that captivate an audience and entice readers to turn page after page. Unfortunately, many of the books assigned in middle school English classrooms across the United States are far from enthralling for adolescent readers. Oftentimes, when the titles on these lackluster reading lists fail to appeal to student interests, student attitudes toward reading are adversely affected. As reading touches all subjects and affects all areas of learning, a negative attitude toward reading can be detrimental to a student’s overall academic development. For these reasons, appealing to student interests and fostering productive student reading behaviors should be among the curricular priorities of middle school English programs throughout the country.

Capturing the interests of today’s middle school students is no easy task. Educators must compete with the interference of cell phones and iPods in school, as well as Facebook, Xbox, and On Demand at home. Anne Trubek asserts that “When it comes to classics, it can be tricky to find the stories that resonate with today's plugged-in kids” (2009, “Out with the Old,” para. 1). However, Traci Maday suggests that “Schools can help provide choices to learners by supplying a variety of text options including age-appropriate books at various reading levels, digital media, newspapers, and magazines” (2008, p.4).

Many researchers assert that empowering students with the freedom of choice has a positive effect on student motivation and engagement (Maday, 2008). By allowing students the opportunity to choose their own reading material, selections more readily appeal to student interests. The activation of student interests, in turn, frequently has a

positive affect upon student reading attitudes and engagement in voluntary reading activities. Although documented benefits of student choice in the selection of reading material are manifold, many educational professionals are still reluctant to incorporate free choice books into their reading curricula. These teachers, like several educational researchers, are concerned with the quality of literature students select when given the freedom to choose. Despite these concerns, a 1993 study by Rick Traw revealed that while a great deal of the literature adolescents were reading was indeed of a rather low quality; much of the “subliterature” appealed to emotional needs and states unique to the adolescents’ developmental levels, and it had the potential to act as a bridge to higher quality reading.

“When curriculum content and learning tasks are relevant and authentic and incorporate choice, students are more likely to view their education as purposeful and engaging” (Maday, 2008, p.4). In the following study, it was my hypothesis that the implementation of a free choice reading program would have a favorable impact upon student reading behaviors including student attitudes toward reading and student engagement in reading activities. A review of relevant literature provides a basis from which this hypothesis, and the subsequent action research project, may be evaluated.

Literature Review

The Problem with Assigned Texts

The same titles very rarely appeal to all students. In the 2008 article, “Don’t Blame the Boys: We’re Giving Them Girly Books,” Kevin St. Jarre (a secondary English teacher) presents one dilemma associated with the universal assignment of literary texts at the secondary level: appealing to both male and female interests with the same book.

St. Jarre argues that a vast majority of contemporary reading lists at the secondary level appeal to primarily female interests, thereby discouraging male students from developing a love for reading and reinforcing the trend in which male secondary students “lag behind” their female counterparts in the subject. Asserting that boys are no less capable than girls when it comes to reading, St. Jarre concludes that the problem lies in the transformation of reading lists over the past few decades (overwhelmingly influenced by female teachers) toward titles that are “introspective in nature”. To remedy the situation, St. Jarre suggests the inclusion of student opinions in the selection of reading material. “If we first allow students to help schools build some diversity into their reading lists, and then we allow students to select what they will read from those lists, we can encourage reading where there currently is none” (2008, para. 14).

While it is difficult to appease the reading interests of individual students without the incorporation of free choice books, assigned texts can be interesting to students when thoughtfully selected. In a 2009 survey of the opinions of several educational professionals across the U.S., Trubek attempts to identify literary works that resonate with today’s middle school students. The article, “Books That Make Middle Schoolers Groan,” discusses the appeal (or lack there of) of several texts, both classic and contemporary, for contemporary young adult audiences. Rollie Welch, collections manager at the Cleveland Public Library and member of the American Library Association's Young Adult Committee, suggests that the key to identifying works that will resonate with today’s middle schoolers lies in recognizing themes that are relevant to them. In addition to identifying relevant themes, the article emphasizes the importance of

knowing one's students and utilizing all that is available within the genre of young adult literature to tailor selections to the contemporary tastes of today's middle schoolers.

Free Choice Reading

Empowered with the freedom of choice, middle school students gravitate toward literary titles and genres that appeal to their individual needs and interests. In the 1993 article, "Nothing in the Middle: What Middle Schoolers Are Reading," Traw evaluates the reading selections of 36 students enrolled in eighth grade English at a university laboratory school. Interesting trends highlighted in Traw's study include: girls reading two books for every one book read by boys; the predominance of three "paired categories" (Teen Issues/Romance, Mystery-Suspense/Supernatural-Horror, and Fantasy/Science-Fiction) among the genres represented in the students' reading lists; the overwhelming consumption of "subliterature" among adolescent readers; and the implications of these trends. Traw asserts that while the presence of "subliterature" among the students' selections is abundant, much of it appeals to the unique developmental needs of adolescents and can "act as a bridge to higher quality reading" (1993, p.13) with proper encouragement from teachers. "What teachers can do is support (students) in their interests at their current stage while showing them ever more mature and reflective works" (1993, p. 7).

The diversity of reading interests at the middle school level is profound, even among like peers. In 2006, Sean Cavazos-Kottke conducted an examination of the bookstore selections of five talented adolescent boys when given the freedom to select titles they found personally interesting; those they associated exclusively with school; and those that met both criteria. Despite the fact that the boys expressed similar interests

in reading material, not one of the forty-six titles selected as personally interesting appeared in more than one boy's selection of texts. Additionally, of the ninety titles in all categories, only one title (*The Maze*) was duplicated among two boys' selections for school-associated materials, with one boy identifying this selection as appealing to personal interest as well. Among the trends observed in the boys' selection of texts were: higher readability scores among texts identified as personally interesting than those associated exclusively with school; the prominence of Science fiction/fantasy and mystery/thriller categories among texts selected as personally interesting; and the prominence of fiction and classic categories among texts associated exclusively with school. In comparing the five boys' selections with the titles listed on the most recent International Reading Association's Young Adults' Choices project book lists (2003-2005), Cavazos-Kottke observed that not one of the ninety titles appearing on the IRA's lists appeared among the boys' selections. Cavazos-Kottke additionally noted the genre most represented in the list was that of young adult realistic fiction, the genre most associated by the boys with school reading. In closing, Cavazos-Kottke asserts that the expressed interests and diverse selection of titles represented among the five adolescent boys in this study, as well as their classification of titles as "personally interesting" and "associated exclusively with school," reveal the complexity of contemporary adolescents' literary interests and the reluctance of contemporary education "to recognize and honor that complexity" (2006, p. 145).

While most students welcome the implementation of a free choice reading program in their English classrooms, some struggle with the selection of free choice books. In the 1993 article, "Help Middle-Schoolers Choose Their Reading Wisely,"

Hilda Ollmann discusses the various strategies adolescents use when selecting free choice books and the implications of these strategies. The article explains that while the majority of students select books of sufficient interest and appropriate difficulty when given the freedom to choose; others lack the ability to do so, and become frustrated by selections that are too hard or fail to appeal to their interests. In assessing the selection strategies employed by the sample of seventh-grade students, Ollmann developed two questionnaires: one to identify which strategies students used in the selection of titles and one to assess student perceptions of the strategies' usefulness in predicting story content. In reviewing the questionnaires, five selection trends were revealed: first, strategies that reveal story content are most important to adolescent readers; second, interesting content overshadows text difficulty, occasionally resulting in the frustration of a reader who selects a text that appeals to his or her interests but exceeds his or her reading ability; third, many adolescents falsely assume all literary titles to be indicative of story content, finding those titles that are not to be misleading; fourth, students avoid strategies that compromise the plot's element of surprise, such as those which reveal endings; and fifth, the reading behaviors of adolescents are highly influenced by teacher modeling of reading strategies (1993, para. 8). In closing, Ollmann suggests that by teaching students how to select free choice books of sufficient interest and appropriate difficulty, these "students will grow to love books" (1993, "Buyer Beware," para. 6).

Promoting Reading

Promoting student interest in reading is critical to cultivating overall academic success. Marlow Ediger argued the importance of involving students in the selection and evaluation processes of the reading curriculum to ensure an appeal to student interests.

“Emerging adolescents need to experience an interesting reading curriculum in order to attain optimal achievement” (1999, p. 1). In the article, “Promoting Interest in Middle School Reading,” Ediger proposed that students be involved not only in the selection of their own reading material, but also in the determination of how their reading progress would be evaluated. The article presents examples of a few evaluation techniques used in a sixth grade classroom and suggests several other approaches for evaluating reading achievement. Ediger asserts that all “approaches used need to encourage, not hinder, interest in reading” (1999, p. 1).

The value of reading extends beyond the English classroom and affects all areas of learning. In the 1991 article, “Promoting reading and writing in the middle-grade content-area classroom,” Barbara Moss asserts the poor performance of American middle schoolers in the subjects of reading and writing is due, at least in part, to a lack of opportunities to develop these skills in school. The article discusses results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and writing (as cited in Mullis, I. V. & Jenkins, L. B., 1990 and Applebee, A. N., Langer, J. A. & Mullis, I. V., 1986) and other reports (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989 and Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A. & Wilkinson, I. A., 1984) that reveal alarming trends in reading and writing proficiency among the nation’s middle schoolers, and Moss makes a call for change to the nation’s teachers. “The messages of the research are clear – teachers must provide more in-class opportunities for silent reading and writing experiences in all classes” (Moss, 1991, para. 5). In the article, Moss presents several strategies for content-area teachers to integrate reading and writing opportunities into their lessons on a daily basis. The implementation of a sustained silent reading program

is particularly suggested as the daily attention given to the subject sends a message of importance to students and establishes reading as deserving of “a place of prominence in their daily lives” (D. Alvermann & K. Muth, 1990, p. 101).

Improving Middle School Reading Behaviors

Amidst the many changes – physical, emotional, intellectual, and social – adolescence brings; academic activities, such as reading, often take a back seat to other teenage interests. In the 2008 article, “Stuck in the Middle: Strategies to Engage Middle-Level Learners,” Maday discusses several underlying causes of adolescent disengagement in school and suggests several strategies for teachers to use to effectively reach middle school students. Maday asserts that student motivation is influenced by both the learning environment and the content being taught. To increase student motivation, Maday suggests a learning environment that: first, is task-oriented rather than performance-oriented; second, considers student effort as a factor when assigning grades; and third, accommodates students’ fear of failing. For content to increase student motivation, Maday asserts it must be relevant, authentic, and incorporate student choice.

“Eighth graders offer librarians and language arts teachers the greatest challenge of matching the student with just the right book” (Collins, J., 2008, p. 44) due to their transition from children’s to young adult and adult literature. In the 2008 article, “Booked Conversation: An Eighth Grade Reading Motivation Program,” Collins discusses the difficulty in appealing to the reading interests of eighth grade students and suggests the implementation of the *Booked Conversation* reading motivation program to accomplish the task. The *Booked Conversation* program aims to “build student self-

confidence and energize free choice reading” by “encouraging students to have a conversation with an adult about a specific book” (2008, p. 44). To successfully implement the program, Collins insists “developing a compelling booklist of about thirty titles in collaboration with teachers is essential” (2008, p. 44). In composing the booklist, the author asserts the importance of selecting titles of varied difficulty and genre (including all categories of fiction, as well as biographies and nonfiction), and encouraging the participation of as many eighth-grade teachers (from all content-areas) as possible.

The hope of several educational professionals is that the activation of student reading interests will increase positive student reading attitudes and behaviors. In the 1994 article, “Longitudinal Study of the Reading Attitudes and Behaviors of Middle School Students,” Ley, Schaer, and Dismukes examine the correlation between the reading attitudes and behaviors of middle schoolers over three years. Before conducting the study, the researchers hypothesized that the data would fail to reveal any statistically significant relationships between reading attitudes and behaviors (as determined respectively by the Teale-Lewis Attitude Reading Scales and the Reading Behavior Profile assessments); differences in reading attitudes or reading behaviors by gender, race, or gender by race interaction; and differences among scores for the three repeated measures (Individual Development, Utilitarian, and Enjoyment subscales of the Teale-Lewis instrument) by grade-level, gender, race, and gender by race interactions. The data from the study supported statistically significant relationships and differences in all three areas, however, and all three hypotheses were rejected. Important trends revealed by this

study that carry significant implications for middle school readers were first, the decline in students' reading attitudes and voluntary reading throughout the middle school years; and second, the fact that students value reading most for its utilitarian purposes and least for enjoyment.

While the research surrounding adolescents and reading is extensive, there is not yet a clear answer on how to best increase the reading attitudes and behaviors of middle school students. The consequence of this unsolved mystery is the poor performance of American middle schoolers in the subjects of reading and writing which, as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development put it, "strikes at the heart of our nation's future prosperity" (1989, p. 27). Despite the fact that a cure-all for middle schoolers' reading apathy has yet to be found, the positive effects of providing increased opportunities for reading and writing in the classroom and appealing to students' interests by empowering them to choose their own texts gives researchers and teachers alike hope for increased adolescent reading attitudes and behaviors in the future.

Research Question(s)

A review of the research led me to the following research questions. My primary research question is "In what ways will the introduction of free choice books to eighth-grade English classes at XYZ Junior High affect voluntary student reading behaviors?" Secondary research questions include "How will the incorporation of choice affect student attitudes toward reading?" and "Will the introduction of free choice books affect the time students spend reading outside of school?" I am also interested in studying the differences in the reading behaviors and attitudes of male and female students.

Methodology

Method and Rationale

In this study, both quantitative (experimental) and qualitative (case study) research methodologies were employed. A quantitative experimental study examines the cause and effect relationship between isolated variables in a random sample of individuals (Jacobson, 2009). Utilizing this methodology therefore increases the validity and generalizability of this study's research findings (Hendricks, 2009). A qualitative case study, on the other hand, seeks to understand a purposively chosen sample in all of its complexity (Jacobson, 2009). By allowing for the comprehensive analysis of select student responses, this methodology adds depth and meaning to the quantitative measurements of the study. As this study sought to examine not only the relationship of cause and effect between the introduction of free choice books to eighth-grade English classes and subsequent student reading behaviors, but also the ways in which those behaviors were affected, employing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in this study was appropriate.

Sample

The quantitative sample for this study consisted of 57 students from Mr. X's four eighth-grade English classes at XYZ Junior High. This population was selected because the researcher was placed within this environment for student teaching. Of the 111 students from these four classes who were eligible to be included in this study, 32 either opted out of the study or did not return parent consent forms, and 22 failed to complete all research activities. XYZ is a public junior high school located in a large suburb approximately fourteen miles outside Seattle, Washington. The student population of

863 seventh, eighth, and ninth-graders is predominantly Caucasian (71 percent) and Asian (17 percent), and of middle to high socioeconomic status (11 percent are eligible for reduced or free lunch) (SchoolDigger.com, 2009). The qualitative sample for this study will consist of select student responses representative of high, middle, and low-level achievers.

Instrumentation

Quantitative research data for this study will be collected using the Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scales, the Reading Behavior Profile (RBP), and a student-completed reading record of minutes spent reading outside of school. The Teale-Lewis instrument assesses students' general attitudes toward reading and the values they place upon reading for three different purposes: Individual Development: a means of gaining insight into self, others, and/or life in general; Utilitarian: for attaining educational or vocational success or for managing in life; and Enjoyment: the pleasure derived from reading (Ley et. al., 1994). The Teale-Lewis scales is "based upon a theoretical foundation of attitude measurement that combines cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of attitude" and contains 33 statements to which students respond one of four ways ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (Ley et. al., 1994, p.20). Statements are worded both positively and negatively and responses are linked to a corresponding value of one through four, one representing the lowest possible reading attitude and four representing the highest possible reading attitude. The three categories described earlier (individual development, utilitarian, and enjoyment) correspond with 11 of the 33 statements on the scales, which allows for the measurement of student attitudes toward each of the three factors in addition to an overall assessment of reading attitudes. The RBP uses student

responses to questions regarding participation in reading activities over a defined period of time to assess students' present levels of voluntary reading activities (Ley et. al., 1994). For the purposes of this study, each indication of participation in a reading activity was awarded a value of one. Using scripted instructions, these instruments were administered to students immediately following the assigned text and free choice reading units (see appendices for instrument examples). The student-completed reading records documented students' reading outside of school for one week and were handed in the week prior to the administration of the Teale-Lewis Scales and the RBP in each of the assigned text and free choice reading units. Students identified minutes read outside of school as either school-related or non-school related. Both assigned and free choice texts were considered school-related reading on these records as they were assigned to students as a part of the regular English curriculum.

Qualitative research data was collected from select students' responses to a brief open-ended survey administered to students following the assigned text and free choice reading units. The selected responses were chosen to represent the opinions of high, middle, and low-level achievers. The open-ended survey asked students to reflect upon certain aspects of the assigned and free choice texts in an attempt to identify student reading interests and themes which resonate with middle school students (see appendices for example of survey).

Analysis and Validity

The Teale-Lewis and RBP instruments were selected on the basis of previously established measures of validity and suitability for assessing the reading attitudes and behaviors of secondary students. When completing reading records to document reading

done outside of school, students were encouraged to provide honest data and students were not rewarded or penalized in correspondence with minutes read. Students were asked to identify themselves when completing these measurements so that trends among specific groups could be researched and identified. However, the welfare and privacy of student participants was safeguarded by removing the names of participants on all data included in the written record of this study, as well as by coding data in the research report according to non-identifying numbers and student pseudonyms. Data from each administration of the Teale-Lewis Scales and the RBP, as well as both student-completed reading records, has been reported, displayed, and compared to reveal trends in student reading attitudes and behaviors that emerged over the course of the study.

Qualitative data; in the form of open-ended survey responses representative of high, middle, and low-level achievers; adds depth and value to the quantitative measurements previously described. Additionally, the triangulation of the various quantitative measures with this qualitative data increases the validity of this study's findings (Hendricks, 2009).

Data

Table 1 (see page 15) displays the results of the two Reading Behavior Profiles administered to students at the conclusion of the assigned text and free choice reading units. The RBP evaluates students' voluntary reading behaviors by asking questions about their reading activities over the most recent seven-day period.

Table 1

Voluntary Student Reading Behaviors During Assigned Text (AT) and Free Choice (FC) Reading Units

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total Reading Behaviors
Student 1 (M) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Student 1 (M) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Student 2 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Student 2 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Student 3 (F) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 3 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 4 (M) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 4 (M) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 5 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 5 (F) - FC	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	4
Student 6 (F) - AT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Student 6 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 7 (F) - AT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Student 7 (F) - FC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 8 (M) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Student 8 (M) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Student 9 (F) - AT	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	6
Student 9 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	5
Student 10 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 10 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 11 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Student 11 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 12 (F) - AT	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Student 12 (F) - FC	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	6
Student 13 (F) - AT	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Student 13 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 14 (M) - AT	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Student 14 (M) - FC	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
Student 15 (F) - AT	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	6
Student 15 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 16 (F) - AT	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	4
Student 16 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 17 (F) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 17 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 18 (F) - AT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Student 18 (F) - FC	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	7
Student 19 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 19 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 20 (M) - AT	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Student 20 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 21 (F) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 21 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total Reading Behaviors
Student 22 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 22 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 23 (M) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 23 (M) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Student 24 (F) - AT	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	5
Student 24 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
Student 25 (M) - AT	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Student 25 (M) - FC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 26 (F) - AT	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	4
Student 26 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 27 (F) - AT	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	6
Student 27 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	5
Student 28 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Student 28 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Student 29 (M) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 29 (M) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 30 (M) - AT	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	4
Student 30 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 31 (F) - AT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Student 31 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 32 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Student 32 (M) - FC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 33 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 33 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 34 (F) - AT	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	7
Student 34 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	4
Student 35 (F) - AT	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 35 (F) - FC	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Student 36 (M) - AT	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 36 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	3
Student 37 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 37 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 38 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 38 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 39 (M) - AT	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	5
Student 39 (M) - FC	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
Student 40 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Student 40 (F) - FC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 41 (F) - AT	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	5
Student 41 (F) - FC	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	6
Student 42 (M) - AT	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	5
Student 42 (M) - FC	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Student 43 (M) - AT	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Student 43 (M) - FC	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Student 44 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 44 (M) - FC	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	5
Student 45 (M) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Student 45 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total Reading Behaviors
Student 46 (M) - AT	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	5
Student 46 (M) - FC	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	6
Student 47 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 47 (M) - FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Student 48 (F) - AT	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	5
Student 48 (F) - FC	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	6
Student 49 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Student 49 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	4
Student 50 (M) - AT	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
Student 50 (M) - FC	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	5
Student 51 (F) - AT	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	5
Student 51 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Student 52 (F) - AT	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	7
Student 52 (F) - FC	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	5
Student 53 (M)- AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	5
Student 53 (M)- FC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Student 54 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	4
Student 54 (F) - FC	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	5
Student 55 (F) - AT	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Student 55 (F) - FC	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
Student 56 (M) - AT	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Student 56 (M) - FC	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Student 57 (F) - AT	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	5
Student 57 (F) - FC	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3

AVERAGES

Female Students - AT	3.94
Female Students - FC	3.44
Male Students - AT	2.8
Male Students - FC	2.48
All Students - AT	3.44/3.37*
All Students - FC	3.02/2.96*

Note. (M) = Male; (F) = Female; AT = Assigned Text Unit; FC = Free Choice Unit.

*Adjusted to represent average with 50/50 male/female representation (Actual sample is 44/56 male/female).

Table 2 (see page 18) displays the category results of the two Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scales administered to students at the conclusion of the assigned text and free choice reading units.

Table 2

*Student Reading Attitudes Following Assigned Text (AT) and Free Choice (FC)
Reading Units*

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	Ind. Devel.	Utilitarian	Enjoyment	Overall
Student 1 (M) - AT	25	27	29	81
Student 1 (M) - FC	19	30	19	68
Student 2 (M) - AT	29	35	35	99
Student 2 (M) - FC	34	41	40	115
Student 3 (F) - AT	24	30	19	73
Student 3 (F) - FC	22	32	20	74
Student 4 (M) - AT	26	34	23	83
Student 4 (M) - FC	28	35	24	83
Student 5 (F) - AT	22	29	23	74
Student 5 (F) - FC	29	30	30	89
Student 6 (F) - AT	29	38	22	89
Student 6 (F) - FC	27	32	21	80
Student 7 (F) - AT	16	33	20	69
Student 7 (F) - FC	17	29	19	65
Student 8 (M) - AT	17	39	26	82
Student 8 (M) - FC	18	42	26	86
Student 9 (F) - AT	29	40	30	99
Student 9 (F) - FC	32	38	29	99
Student 10 (M) - AT	24	31	15	70
Student 10 (M) - FC	18	33	17	68
Student 11 (F) - AT	24	32	27	83
Student 11 (F) - FC	31	35	29	95
Student 12 (F) - AT	28	26	31	85
Student 12 (F) - FC	34	33	38	105
Student 13 (F) - AT	27	36	28	91
Student 13 (F) - FC	25	35	27	87
Student 14 (M) - AT	36	41	41	118
Student 14 (M) - FC	38	41	40	119
Student 15 (F) - AT	28	33	31	92
Student 15 (F) - FC	31	36	31	98
Student 16 (F) - AT	30	37	33	100
Student 16 (F) - FC	28	41	33	102
Student 17 (F) - AT	32	37	30	99
Student 17 (F) - FC	33	34	31	98
Student 18 (F) - AT	37	40	32	109
Student 18 (F) - FC	36	44	32	112
Student 19 (M) - AT	27	29	23	79
Student 19 (M) - FC	23	28	19	70
Student 20 (M) - AT	25	30	20	75
Student 20 (M) - FC	23	30	18	71
Student 21 (F) - AT	33	33	39	105
Student 21 (F) - FC	36	35	41	112

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	Ind. Devel.	Utilitarian	Enjoyment	Overall
Student 22 (M) - AT	28	31	25	84
Student 22 (M) - FC	23	29	24	76
Student 23 (M) - AT	22	30	18	70
Student 23 (M) - FC	23	30	23	76
Student 24 (F) - AT	39	36	37	112
Student 24 (F) - FC	40	38	38	116
Student 25 (M) - AT	18	33	16	67
Student 25 (M) - FC	23	29	21	73
Student 26 (F) - AT	29	37	34	100
Student 26 (F) - FC	28	36	29	93
Student 27 (F) - AT	40	38	32	110
Student 27 (F) - FC	37	41	38	116
Student 28 (F) - AT	28	33	32	93
Student 28 (F) - FC	33	38	34	105
Student 29 (M) - AT	26	29	25	80
Student 29 (M) - FC	25	31	22	78
Student 30 (M) - AT	24	39	39	102
Student 30 (M) - FC	22	39	34	95
Student 31 (F) - AT	30	38	40	108
Student 31 (F) - FC	33	38	43	114
Student 32 (M) - AT	23	27	15	65
Student 32 (M) - FC	22	23	12	57
Student 33 (F) - AT	26	34	27	87
Student 33 (F) - FC	26	40	28	94
Student 34 (F) - AT	32	37	41	110
Student 34 (F) - FC	31	31	41	103
Student 35 (F) - AT	24	31	14	69
Student 35 (F) - FC	23	30	21	74
Student 36 (M) - AT	35	40	37	112
Student 36 (M) - FC	34	41	38	113
Student 37 (F) - AT	32	34	32	98
Student 37 (F) - FC	30	33	33	96
Student 38 (F) - AT	23	26	34	83
Student 38 (F) - FC	22	30	33	85
Student 39 (M) - AT	25	30	36	91
Student 39 (M) - FC	24	27	31	82
Student 40 (F) - AT	24	30	14	68
Student 40 (F) - FC	18	31	15	64
Student 41 (F) - AT	32	37	39	108
Student 41 (F) - FC	34	38	37	109
Student 42 (M) - AT	30	38	27	95
Student 42 (M) - FC	25	30	20	75
Student 43 (M) - AT	27	35	22	84
Student 43 (M) - FC	30	32	18	80
Student 44 (M) - AT	27	32	32	91
Student 44 (M) - FC	31	40	29	100
Student 45 (M) - AT	20	38	41	99
Student 45 (M) - FC	19	38	41	98

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	Ind. Devel.	Utilitarian	Enjoyment	Overall
Student 46 (M) - AT	31	32	30	93
Student 46 (M) - FC	27	36	28	91
Student 47 (M) - AT	36	37	34	107
Student 47 (M) - FC	34	37	30	101
Student 48 (F) - AT	27	34	30	91
Student 48 (F) - FC	26	34	33	93
Student 49 (F) - AT	31	32	28	91
Student 49 (F) - FC	27	35	21	83
Student 50 (M) - AT	28	36	32	96
Student 50 (M) - FC	29	35	32	96
Student 51 (F) - AT	20	26	15	61
Student 51 (F) - FC	26	33	27	86
Student 52 (F) - AT	38	42	41	121
Student 52 (F) - FC	36	43	40	119
Student 53 (M) - AT	33	43	32	108
Student 53 (M) - FC	31	38	31	100
Student 54 (F) - AT	34	32	37	103
Student 54 (F) - FC	34	32	36	102
Student 55 (F) - AT	29	34	29	92
Student 55 (F) - FC	30	29	30	89
Student 56 (M) - AT	24	31	29	84
Student 56 (M) - FC	26	35	30	91
Student 57 (F) - AT	32	34	35	101
Student 57 (F) - FC	31	30	35	96

AVERAGES

Female Students - AT	29.03	34.03	29.88	92.94
Female Students - FC	29.56	34.81	31.03	95.41
Male Students - AT	26.64	33.88	28.08	88.6
Male Students - FC	25.96	34	26.68	86.64
All Students - AT	27.98/27.84*	33.97/33.96*	29.09/28.98*	91.04/90.77*
All Students - FC	27.98/27.76*	34.46/34.41*	29.12/28.86*	91.56/91.03*

Note. (M) = Male; (F) = Female; AT = Assigned Text Unit; FC = Free Choice Unit;
Ind. Devel. = Individual Development.

*Adjusted to represent average with 50/50 male/female representation (Actual sample is 44/56 male/female).

Table 3 (see page 21) displays the results of the two student-completed reading records. During the last week of the assigned text and free choice reading units, students were instructed to document all reading completed outside of school.

Table 3

Student Reading Completed Outside of School During Assigned Text (AT) and Free Choice (FC) Reading Units

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	S-R Min. Read	N-S-R Min. Read	Total Min. Read
Student 1 (M) - AT	150	150	300
Student 1 (M) - FC	62	0	62
Student 2 (M) - AT	115	290	405
Student 2 (M) - FC	340	200	540
Student 3 (F) - AT	50	0	50
Student 3 (F) - FC	0	0	0
Student 4 (M) - AT	72	0	72
Student 4 (M) - FC	180	0	180
Student 5 (F) - AT	70	70	140
Student 5 (F) - FC	280	0	280
Student 6 (F) - AT	60	0	60
Student 6 (F) - FC	0	0	0
Student 7 (F) - AT	60	0	60
Student 7 (F) - FC	105	67	172
Student 8 (M) - AT	0	190	190
Student 8 (M) - FC	0	140	140
Student 9 (F) - AT	100	95	195
Student 9 (F) - FC	460	0	460
Student 10 (M) - AT	20	0	20
Student 10 (M) - FC	0	60	60
Student 11 (F) - AT	200	0	200
Student 11 (F) - FC	650	30	680
Student 12 (F) - AT	0	0	0
Student 12 (F) - FC	0	160	160
Student 13 (F) - AT	165	0	165
Student 13 (F) - FC	100	0	100
Student 14 (M) - AT	45	240	285
Student 14 (M) - FC	80	30	110
Student 15 (F) - AT	0	200	200
Student 15 (F) - FC	175	0	175
Student 16 (F) - AT	0	280	280
Student 16 (F) - FC	195	0	195
Student 17 (F) - AT	20	405	425
Student 17 (F) - FC	285	100	385
Student 18 (F) - AT	0	60	60
Student 18 (F) - FC	180	0	180
Student 19 (M) - AT	30	0	30
Student 19 (M) - FC	0	0	0
Student 20 (M) - AT	45	15	60
Student 20 (M) - FC	165	0	165
Student 21 (F) - AT	0	235	235
Student 21 (F) - FC	0	160	160

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	S-R Min. Read	N-S-R Min. Read	Total Min. Read
Student 22 (M) - AT	60	0	60
Student 22 (M) - FC	230	0	230
Student 23 (M) - AT	0	60	60
Student 23 (M) - FC	0	0	0
Student 24 (F) - AT	0	130	130
Student 24 (F) - FC	15	105	120
Student 25 (M) - AT	70	0	70
Student 25 (M) - FC	135	0	135
Student 26 (F) - AT	25	100	125
Student 26 (F) - FC	258	0	258
Student 27 (F) - AT	35	70	105
Student 27 (F) - FC	100	0	100
Student 28 (F) - AT	0	210	210
Student 28 (F) - FC	110	30	140
Student 29 (M) - AT	155	0	155
Student 29 (M) - FC	103	25	128
Student 30 (M) - AT	0	297	297
Student 30 (M) - FC	0	210	210
Student 31 (F) - AT	30	5	35
Student 31 (F) - FC	115	0	115
Student 32 (M) - AT	0	120	120
Student 32 (M) - FC	60	0	60
Student 33 (F) - AT	60	100	160
Student 33 (F) - FC	46	60	106
Student 34 (F) - AT	0	450	450
Student 34 (F) - FC	120	0	120
Student 35 (F) - AT	0	0	0
Student 35 (F) - FC	70	0	70
Student 36 (M) - AT	0	120	120
Student 36 (M) - FC	240	0	240
Student 37 (F) - AT	68	70	138
Student 37 (F) - FC	93	55	148
Student 38 (F) - AT	0	225	225
Student 38 (F) - FC	130	0	130
Student 39 (M) - AT	120	65	185
Student 39 (M) - FC	133	0	133
Student 40 (F) - AT	140	175	315
Student 40 (F) - FC	145	20	165
Student 41 (F) - AT	5	93	98
Student 41 (F) - FC	105	10	115
Student 42 (M) - AT	0	130	130
Student 42 (M) - FC	70	0	70
Student 43 (M) - AT	50	90	140
Student 43 (M) - FC	140	0	140
Student 44 (M) - AT	30	0	30
Student 44 (M) - FC	0	0	0
Student 45 (M) - AT	10	235	245
Student 45 (M) - FC	40	401	441

Name (M/F) - AT/FC	S-R Min. Read	N-S-R Min. Read	Total Min. Read
Student 46 (M) - AT	24	116	140
Student 46 (M) - FC	92	0	92
Student 47 (M) - AT	15	50	65
Student 47 (M) - FC	120	0	120
Student 48 (F) - AT	0	120	120
Student 48 (F) - FC	120	0	120
Student 49 (F) - AT	79	55	134
Student 49 (F) - FC	130	0	130
Student 50 (M) - AT	0	180	180
Student 50 (M) - FC	75	100	175
Student 51 (F) - AT	0	179	179
Student 51 (F) - FC	138	0	138
Student 52 (F) - AT	0	210	210
Student 52 (F) - FC	170	195	365
Student 53 (M)- AT	0	120	120
Student 53 (M)- FC	120	0	120
Student 54 (F) - AT	43	80	123
Student 54 (F) - FC	160	0	160
Student 55 (F) - AT	120	0	120
Student 55 (F) - FC	95	0	95
Student 56 (M) - AT	80	135	215
Student 56 (M) - FC	65	110	175
Student 57 (F) - AT	30	90	120
Student 57 (F) - FC	60	60	120

AVERAGES

Female Students - AT	42	116	158
Female Students - FC	144	33	177
Male Students - AT	44	104	148
Male Students - FC	98	51	149
All Students - AT	43/43*	111/110*	154/153*
All Students - FC	124/121*	41/42*	165/163*

Note. (M) = Male; (F) = Female; AT = Assigned Text Unit; FC = Free Choice Unit; S-R = School-Related; N-S-R = Non-School Related; Min. = Minutes.

*Adjusted to represent average with 50/50 male/female representation (Actual sample is 44/56 male/female).

Qualitative data was collected in the form of select students' responses to a brief open-ended survey. Students were asked to respond to the same five survey questions at the conclusion of the assigned text and free choice reading units. The assigned text for all students was The Year of the Hangman, a uchronia or alternate history classified under the historical fiction genre. Free choice reads were different for each student and could be selected from any literary genre; they only had to meet the criteria of being new

to the reader (not something the student had read previously) and a minimum of 150 pages in length. Tables 4.1 through 4.6 display the survey responses of the selected six students, representative of high, middle, and low-level achievers; both male and female.

Table 4.1

Assigned Text and Free Choice Read Open-Ended Survey Responses of a High-Achieving Female

High-Achieving Female (#26)	Assigned Text	Free Choice Read
1. What, if anything, did you like about this book? Why?	"I liked how there was a lot of action in the book and how it left you hanging after each chapter so you wanted to read more."	"I loved the whole story. My favorite part was the ending because it was such a surprise."
2. What, if anything, did you dislike about this book? Why?	"I disliked how Benjamin Franklin died because he was one of my favorite characters."	"I did not like how there was a lot of depressing parts."
3. Did you identify with any of the main characters in this book? Why or why not?	"I did identify with (character) because we have the same name but nothing else because this was written about a different time."	"I did not really identify with any of the main characters because one had cancer and I have never had that."
4. Was reading this book valuable to you in any way? In other words, did you learn anything from this book? Please describe.	"I learned that loyalty is not always the best virtue or trait."	"I learned that the love of a sister is very strong and family should stick with you through anything."
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?	"I would recommend this book to a friend who likes historical fiction."	"Yes but only if you are ok with sad books."

Table 4.2

Assigned Text and Free Choice Read Open-Ended Survey Responses of a High-Achieving Male

High-Achieving Male (#14)	Assigned Text	Free Choice Read
1. What, if anything, did you like about this book? Why?	"I liked the way the author explored a very believable alternate history. Mainly because I find that period of American history very interesting. So it was fun to see it twisted in such an elaborate way."	"My book was very funny and I thoroughly enjoyed that about it. Mainly because I like humor. Also, I loved the style and voice with which Mr. Lewis projected Screwtape's letters. Because his writing is dripping with sarcasm, dry wit, and contempt making him a hilarious character."
2. What, if anything, did you dislike about this book? Why?	"I disliked the ending. Just because it left so many loose ends."	"The only thing I disliked about this book was that it was at part a little tedious. However, this only occurred once in a while."

3. Did you identify with any of the main characters in this book? Why or why not?	"I identified with L. Hale. Because he is always trying to stop people fighting which I do alot."	"I identified with Wormwood's patient. Because he is constantly struggling to be the best person he can be, which is something many people struggle with."
4. Was reading this book valuable to you in any way? In other words, did you learn anything from this book? Please describe.	"I think this book was a good way to explore alternate history. But it didn't really teach me anything."	"Reading this book was an excellent way to self-examine my own life and reflect on ways to make it better."
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?	"Yes. Because I thought it was an interesting read."	"Yes I would. Because I thought it was a life changing book which leads people down all the right paths of life."

Table 4.3

Assigned Text and Free Choice Read Open-Ended Survey Responses of a Middle-Achieving Female

Middle-Achieving Female (#41)	Assigned Text	Free Choice Read
1. What, if anything, did you like about this book? Why?	"I like how Creighton began to change. When he was careless but than he began to be good."	"I like the romance between Will and Ronnie because I've never been able to experience that, so it's nice to be in someone else's shoes."
2. What, if anything, did you dislike about this book? Why?	"The beginning was really boring and I wonder what happened to his mom."	"I loved this whole book because it wasn't just romance."
3. Did you identify with any of the main characters in this book? Why or why not?	"I can relate to Peter because he is really nice and caring."	"I could relate to Ronnie because I know how the pain feels with divorced parents."
4. Was reading this book valuable to you in any way? In other words, did you learn anything from this book? Please describe.	"I didn't really learn anything."	"I learned to appreciate everyone and everything I have because Ronnie lost a loved one."
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?	"No because me and my friend are into different books."	"I would recommend this book to a friend because it can relate to anyone."

Table 4.4

Assigned Text and Free Choice Read Open-Ended Survey Responses of a Middle-Achieving Male

Middle-Achieving Male (#43)	Assigned Text	Free Choice Read
1. What, if anything, did you like about this book? Why?	"I liked the subject of the book."	"I liked that it was about baseball. Also, the way the author described the book made me feel like I was in the book not just reading it."
2. What, if anything, did you dislike about this book? Why?	"I didn't have any problem with the book."	"I can't say I disliked anything about the book."

3. Did you identify with any of the main characters in this book? Why or why not?	"No I don't because all of the characters have different personalities than me."	"I could sort of relate to Hutch. In the way that he loves baseball, as do I."
4. Was reading this book valuable to you in any way? In other words, did you learn anything from this book? Please describe.	"No I didn't."	"I learned that some people will go to extreme lengths for things that they love."
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?	"Yes I would because it was an interesting book."	"I would recommend the book to a friend because it's very interesting and keeps you on the edge of your seat."

Table 4.5

Assigned Text and Free Choice Read Open-Ended Survey Responses of a Low-Achieving Female

Low-Achieving Female (#51)	Assigned Text	Free Choice Read
1. What, if anything, did you like about this book? Why?	"Nothing. I thought the book was really boring."	"I liked how the author described things and how Sierra's personality was like."
2. What, if anything, did you dislike about this book? Why?	"It was really slow."	"The thing I disliked the most was how slow it was."
3. Did you identify with any of the main characters in this book? Why or why not?	"Yes. Creighton was really angry and kept it all in."	"Yes, we both put God in control of our life."
4. Was reading this book valuable to you in any way? In other words, did you learn anything from this book? Please describe.	"No, I didn't really understand it."	"I didn't really learn anything."
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?	"No, because I didn't like it myself."	"Yes because the whole collection before this was great. I couldn't put it down."

Table 4.6

Assigned Text and Free Choice Read Open-Ended Survey Responses of a Low-Achieving Male

Low-Achieving Male (#19)	Assigned Text	Free Choice Read
1. What, if anything, did you like about this book? Why?	"When Peter threw the anchor because that would be sick."	"Most books you read you have to read 100 pages before the interesting stuff happens, but in this book the interesting stuff happens after 20 pages."
2. What, if anything, did you dislike about this book? Why?	"It was boring and the book said he had to make a decision that could change the war when if he died on the boat not much would have changed."	"I didn't dislike anything."
3. Did you identify with any of the main characters in this book?	"No because none was very laid back."	"I identified with Milo because sometimes life can be boring."

4. Was reading this book valuable to you in any way? In other words, did you learn anything from this book? Please describe.	“I learned there is never a good war or a bad peace.”	“I didn’t really learn anything.”
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?	“Well I would recommend this book to anyone that like uchronia.”	“Yes because it’s a funny book.”

Analysis

Reading Behaviors

As displayed in Table 1 (see page 14), student reading behaviors during the assigned text and free choice reading units were measured using the Reading Behavior Profile. For each indication of participation in a reading activity students were assigned a value of one. As there were eight assessment items on the RBP, the maximum number of reading activities possible in the seven-day period being assessed was eight (see RBP in appendices for assessment items).

In the first administration of the RBP following the assigned text unit, female students participated in an average of 3.94 reading activities in the seven days leading up to the assessment. Male participation in the same reading activities was nearly 30 (28.93) percent lower at an average of 2.80 activities over the previous seven days. This made the overall student average for the first administration of the RBP, representing student reading behavior during the assigned text unit, 3.44 (3.37 if weighted to represent 50/50 male/female representation).

In the second administration of the RBP following the free choice reading unit, female students participated in an average of 3.44 reading activities in the seven days leading up to the assessment. This represented a decline of 12.7 percent in the reading behavior of female students when compared to the first administration of the RBP immediately following the assigned text unit. Male participation in the same reading

activities was again nearly 30 (27.91) percent lower than that of the female members of the class at an average of 2.48 activities over the previous seven days. This represented a decline of 11.4 percent in the reading behavior of male students. The overall student average for the second administration of the RBP, representing student reading behavior during the free choice reading unit, was 3.02 (2.96 if weighted to represent 50/50 male/female representation); indicating an overall decline of 12.2 percent in the reading behavior of students during the free choice reading unit.

Despite the decline in the average reading activities of both male and female students between the first and second administration of the RBP, 12 (5 female, 7 male) of the 57 students in the study experienced no change in reading behavior between the two units and 17 (10 female, 7 male) exhibited increased reading behavior in the free choice reading unit. From the results of the RBP alone, it is difficult to identify any specific patterns of increased or decreased reading behavior among specific groups of students between the two units; however, analysis of the additional data collected in this study may provide further insight into these aspects of the research question(s).

Reading Attitudes

As displayed in Table 2 (see page 17), student reading attitudes during the assigned text and free choice reading units were measured using the Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scales. The Teale-Lewis Scales allows for the measurement of overall student reading attitudes, as well as student attitudes toward reading for three different purposes: individual development, utility, and enjoyment. This assessment, therefore, allows us to examine not only changes in student attitudes toward reading; but also changes in the value students place upon reading for multiple purposes.

In the first administration of the Teale-Lewis Scales following the assigned text unit, the overall reading attitudes of female students averaged 92.94. In this first administration, female students valued reading for the purpose of utility the highest with an average attitude of 34.03. Female students valued reading for enjoyment second with an average attitude of 29.88, and placed the smallest value on reading for the purpose of individual development with an average attitude of 29.03. Like the reading behaviors described in the previous section, the reading attitudes of male students lag behind their female counterparts. The overall average reading attitude of male students in the first administration of the scales was 88.60, nearly five (4.67) percent less than that of their female classmates. Despite the fact that male students average lower reading attitudes in each of the three categories measured, male and female students value reading for the three purposes in the same order. Like their female classmates, male students valued reading for the purpose of utility first with an average attitude of 33.88; enjoyment, second, with an average attitude of 28.08; and individual development, third, with an average attitude of 26.64. This made the overall average of student reading attitudes for the first administration of the Teale-Lewis Scales, representing student reading attitudes during the assigned text unit, 91.04 (90.77 if weighted to represent 50/50 male/female representation) – 33.97 (33.96 weighted 50/50) Utilitarian, 29.09 (28.98 weighted 50/50) Enjoyment, and 27.98 (27.84 weighted 50/50) Individual Development.

In the second administration of the Teale-Lewis Scales following the free choice reading unit, the reading attitudes of female students increased in all three categories. The overall average reading attitude for female students increased from 92.94 in the assigned text unit to 95.41 in the free choice reading unit, representing an average

increase in the overall reading attitudes of females of just under three (2.66) percent. Female students again valued reading for utilitarian purposes the highest with an average attitude of 34.81, followed by reading for enjoyment with an average of 31.03, and finally, reading for the purpose of individual development was the least valued with an average of 29.56. The results for male students in the second administration were quite different. While the average male attitude toward reading for utilitarian purposes in the free choice reading unit rose 3.54 percent over the assigned text unit for an average attitude of 34.00, the averages for individual development, enjoyment, and overall reading attitudes among male students all decreased. Behind reading for utility at 34.00 came reading for enjoyment at 26.68 and last came reading for the purpose of individual development with an average attitude of 25.96. This brought the overall average reading attitude of male students in the free choice reading unit to 26.64, representing an average decrease in the overall reading attitudes of males of just over two (2.21) percent. The increase in female attitudes toward reading and the decrease (in all but one category) in male reading attitudes, and the composition of the study sample (56 percent female, 44 percent male) makes calculating the average reading attitudes for the second administration of the scales interesting. Averages for students' overall reading attitudes and attitudes toward reading for utilitarian purposes increased in the second administration of the scales, representing increased attitudes in these two areas in association with the free choice reading unit. The average for overall student reading attitudes in the second administration of the Teale-Lewis Scales was 91.56 (91.03 weighted 50/50), representing an increase of less than one (0.57) percent in the free choice reading unit. The average for student reading attitudes for utilitarian purposes in

the second administration of the scales was 34.46 (34.41 weighted 50/50), representing an increase of slightly more than one (1.44) percent between the two administrations. In the averages for students' attitudes toward reading for enjoyment and individual development, however, the results change based upon the calculation of the average. When all survey participants' scores are averaged, the average attitude for reading for enjoyment is 29.12, representing a minute (0.10 percent) increase over the average in the assigned text unit; however, when the average is weighted for 50/50 male/female representation, it becomes 28.86, representing a slightly larger (although still miniscule at 0.41 percent) decrease between the two administrations. The same is true of the calculation of averages for the attitudes toward reading for the purpose of individual development. When all survey participants' scores are averaged, the average attitude for reading for individual development is 27.98, representing no change in attitude between the assigned text and free choice reading units; however, when the average is weighted for 50/50 male/female representation, it becomes 27.76, representing a 0.29 percent decrease in attitude in the free choice unit.

Given the minimal change in the total student averages between the two administrations of the scales, it is the value students place on reading for different purposes and the changes in female and male attitudes between the two reading units exhibited in this portion of the study that reveal the most. Consistent with the longitudinal study conducted by Ley et. al. (1994), the middle school students in this study most valued reading for utilitarian purposes and significant differences in the reading attitudes of male and female students were present. Unlike the 1994 study in which middle schoolers in the study valued reading for enjoyment last, however, the

eighth-graders in this study valued reading for enjoyment second, and reading for individual development last. Finally, while lower reading attitudes among male students is consistent with previous measurements of reading attitudes, the increase in female attitudes and decrease in male attitudes associated with the implementation of the free choice reading unit may be worthy of further investigation in future studies.

Reading Outside of School

As displayed in Table 3 (see page 20), students' reading outside of school during the assigned text and free choice reading units was measured using student-completed reading records. In addition to recording all reading done outside of school during the final week of the assigned text and free choice reading units, students were directed to classify minutes read as either school-related or non-school related. As both the assigned and free choice texts were integrated into the regular English curriculum, students' classified the reading of both of these texts as school-related.

According to reading record one, kept during the final week of the assigned text unit, female students spent an average of 158 minutes reading outside of school. Of these 158 minutes, 42 were school-related and the remaining 116 were non-school-related. During the same week, male students spent an average of 148 minutes reading outside of school. Of these 148 minutes, 44 were school-related and the remaining 104 were non-school-related. This made the overall student average for minutes read outside of school during the assigned text reading unit 154 (153 weighted 50/50), with an average of 43 minutes devoted to school-related reading and 111 (110 weighted 50/50) devoted to non-school-related reading.

The results of reading record two, kept during the final week of the free choice

reading unit, showed increases in male and female averages for school-related and total minutes read outside of school. Non-school-related minutes decreased for both groups, however. During the free choice unit, female students spent an average of 177 minutes reading outside of school, representing a 12 percent increase over the assigned text unit. Of these 177 minutes, 144 were school-related (increase of 243 percent) and only 33 (71.55 percent decrease) were non-school-related. During the same week, male students spent an average of 149 minutes reading outside of school, only one minute (and less than one percent) more than during the assigned text unit. Of these 149 minutes, 98 were school-related (increase of 123 percent) and 51 (50.96 percent decrease) were non-school-related. This made the overall student average for minutes read outside of school during the free choice reading unit 165 (163 weighted 50/50), representing an increase of 7.14 percent over the assigned text unit. The average school-related minutes increased 188 percent to 124 (121 weighted 50/50), while non-school-related minutes dropped 63 percent to 41 (42 weighted 50/50).

While the declining values for non-school-related reading done outside of school during the free choice unit does not point to increased voluntary reading as a result of the implementation of a free choice reading program, the classification of the free choice text as school-related reading is likely responsible for the monumental shift in the school-related and non-school-related reading averages between the two reading records. The promising trend among students reading behavior during the free choice unit, however, is the increase in the average overall reading completed by students outside of school. The results of the reading records again point to the significant differences in the reading behaviors of male and female students and when considered in accordance with other

study data, may point to a more positive correlation between the implementation of a free choice reading program and increased reading attitudes and behaviors for female middle school students than males.

Reading Behaviors of High, Middle, and Low-Level Achievers

When reviewing the survey responses of all students, one thing became more apparent than anything else: the reading interests of middle school students are extremely diverse. However, in comparing the responses of the selected six students, chosen to represent male and female high, middle, and low-level achievers, a few trends were identified. Common likes among all students were fast-paced writing that kept the reader engaged, the author's use of strong description, and interesting content. The most common dislike among students was that the book was boring or slow. Additionally, female students commented on disliking sad parts in the books, such as the sickness or death of a character. In general, students seemed to identify with characters on a limited basis of similar personality traits or experiences. This inability to identify with characters that are different from them may be a factor in the low value students in this study placed upon reading for individual development. High-achievers, both male and female, were more likely than low-achievers to express that they had learned something from the book. Given the value students place upon reading for utilitarian purposes, this may be a factor in the higher overall reading attitudes exhibited by high-achievers. Finally, male students were more likely than female students to recommend the assigned text to a friend, consistent with the notion that the historical fiction genre resonates more with male students than with females. This may have been a contributing factor in the increased reading attitudes and behaviors exhibited by females in this study. Finally, while student

opinions of the assigned text varied, all students expressed overwhelmingly positive opinions of their free choice reading selections and stated that they would recommend their free choice reading selections to a friend.

Implications/Recommendations

The implications of this study are manifold. First, the results of this study confirm that the reading attitudes and behaviors of middle school students are extremely diverse. In turn, what affects the attitudes and behaviors of one group of students may have little to no affect on another group.

In this study, it was my hope that the implementation of a free choice reading program would result in significantly increased reading attitudes and behaviors among middle school students. Given the varied results of this study, however, a direct correlation between the two factors is difficult to assert. While the Teale-Lewis Scales pointed to increased overall student reading attitudes at the conclusion of the free choice reading unit, particularly among female students, the average reading behaviors in both male and female students dropped between the first and second administrations of the RBP. Additionally, while students recorded spending more time reading outside of school during the free choice reading unit, non-school related reading minutes decreased significantly. Finally, while the examination of qualitative data representative of male and female high, middle, and low-level achievers in the form of open-ended survey responses added insight into the quantitative trends demonstrated through previous data analysis, no definitive explanation for the differences among the various groups of students (males, females, high-achievers, low-achievers, etc.) emerged.

It is my recommendation, therefore, that additional analysis of the effects of free

choice reading upon middle school reading attitudes and behaviors be conducted. In future studies, steps should be taken to identify and isolate outside factors that may have affected the results of this study. In repeating this study, for example, it would be interesting to have one group of students participate in the free choice reading unit first, while another group participates in the assigned text unit first, and see if the order or time of year in which students are assessed following the units affects measurement outcomes. Additionally, while the assigned text in this study was of the historical fiction genre (typically appealing more to male students than female students), it would be interesting to see if study results change when an assigned text of another genre is compared to students' free choice selections.

Conclusion

As reading touches all subjects and affects all areas of learning, it is the opinion of the researcher that appealing to student interests and fostering productive student reading behaviors should be among the curricular priorities of middle school English programs throughout the country. While this study may have fallen short of establishing a direct correlation between the implementation of a free choice reading program and increased reading attitudes and behaviors among all middle school students, improvement among select students and groups demonstrates that incorporating choice into the reading curriculum can have a positive impact and free choice reading is worthy of a place in the middle school English classroom.

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Appendix A – Reading Behavior Profile

During the past seven days have you...

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Read at least one magazine article? | YES | NO |
| 2. Read a chapter in a book other than an assigned textbook? | YES | NO |
| 3. Spent at least a <u>total</u> of one hour reading a newspaper? | YES | NO |
| 4. *Purchased a book other than an assigned textbook? | YES | NO |
| 5. Spent more than 20 minutes browsing in a library or bookstore? | YES | NO |
| 6. *Purchased a magazine? | YES | NO |
| 7. *Purchased a newspaper? | YES | NO |
| 8. Spent more than 10 minutes talking about a book,
a magazine article, or a newspaper article with someone? | YES | NO |

*Include purchases made by your parent/guardian at your request

Appendix B - Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scales

STUDENT OPINION SURVEY

1. Would you please fill in your name?

Name: _____

2. There are a number of statements about reading in this Survey.
Please give your opinion about these statements as quickly as you can.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. This is not a test or examination. What we want is your opinion. Please do not write what you think other people want you to believe. Try to indicate what you think. Your answers will not be graded or have any influence on grades in any subject.

3. You should answer the statements by circling the appropriate symbol beside the statements.

Draw a circle around:

SA if you STRONGLY AGREE with the statement.

A if you AGREE with the statement.

D if you DISAGREE with the statement.

SD if you STRONGLY DISAGREE with the statement.

Practice items:

- | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|----|
| (a) My teachers are easy to get along with. | SA | A | D | SD |
| (b) I like science classes. | SA | A | D | SD |
| (c) I don't like coming to school. | SA | A | D | SD |
| (d) School is not boring. | SA | A | D | SD |

4. If you change your mind about an answer, just cross it out and circle another one. Please give an answer to every statement.
5. Turn over and start when I ask you. Remember to answer quickly and not spend a lot of time on each.

1.	The more I read, the more I learn about myself.	1.	SA	A	D	SD
2.	There are many things I would rather do than read.	2.	SA	A	D	SD
3.	A person who cannot read well will have trouble doing the everyday things involved in life.	3.	SA	A	D	SD
4.	Reading is an interesting way of spending time.	4.	SA	A	D	SD
5.	Reading won't get you far in life.	5.	SA	A	D	SD
6.	Reading does not help me form opinions.	6.	SA	A	D	SD
7.	Being able to read well is a great help to people in their schoolwork.	7.	SA	A	D	SD
8.	I enjoy reading.	8.	SA	A	D	SD
9.	Most books are too long and dull.	9.	SA	A	D	SD
10.	Successful people read.	10.	SA	A	D	SD
11.	Reading does not help me to understand people better.	11.	SA	A	D	SD
12.	In today's modern world reading is not important.	12.	SA	A	D	SD
13.	Reading helps develop a person's character.	13.	SA	A	D	SD
14.	Reading is a good way to spend spare time.	14.	SA	A	D	SD
15.	People who read are usually interesting people.	15.	SA	A	D	SD
16.	A time will come when people will not need to be able to read.	16.	SA	A	D	SD
17.	Reading just doesn't appeal to me.	17.	SA	A	D	SD
18.	Being able to read is the most important thing for doing well at school.	18.	SA	A	D	SD
19.	Reading does not help me decide what I think about things.	19.	SA	A	D	SD
20.	People who read are better judges of other people.	20.	SA	A	D	SD
21.	Reading is fun.	21.	SA	A	D	SD
22.	Being able to read well helps a person get a better job.	22.	SA	A	D	SD
23.	Reading quickly becomes boring for me.	23.	SA	A	D	SD
24.	People who read are better able to see what is important in life.	24.	SA	A	D	SD

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|----|---|---|----|
| 25. | Reading does not help me understand myself better. | 25. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 26. | You can get just as far in life without reading. | 26. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 27. | I like reading more than I like a lot of other things. | 27. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 28. | Reading helps me make up my mind about what I believe. | 28. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 29. | People who read a lot do best at school. | 29. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 30. | Reading is mostly boring. | 30. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 31. | Reading helps me a lot to understand how other people feel about things. | 31. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 32. | Being able to read well does not help people get ahead in life. | 32. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 33. | I usually don't like to read about things. | 33. | SA | A | D | SD |

Appendix C – Open-Ended Survey Questions

1. What, if anything, did you like about this book? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you dislike about this book? Why?
3. Did you identify with any of the main characters in this book? Why or why not?
4. Was reading this book valuable to you in any way? In other words, did you learn anything from this book? Please describe.
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?