This qualitative study examined the influences on teachers’ decision making when structuring eighth grade reading/language arts curriculum and their choices of reading material and accompanying activities. Nineteen teachers in six school districts participated. Data collection consisted of a pre-interview questionnaire, interviews, and additional data from public information such as local school report card ratings from the state of Ohio and Ohio data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress for comparison data.

The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading material and activities? (2) How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making in the district? (3) What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading/language arts? (4) What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to do with that reading material? (5) When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities? (6) How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers’ decisions changes over time?
Data analysis resulted in an interpretive theory that the *Ohio Academic Content Standards English Language Arts* and the Ohio Achievement Test are the driving forces in curriculum decision making. Teachers are using the standards, district curriculum maps and book lists, student interest, teacher interest, and availability of materials to decide what to ask students to read and do with the end goal being success on the achievement test. When teachers are feeling pressure from the district leadership to raise test scores, they are including a focus on skills for the test such as modeling questions, practice writing extended responses, and using practice tests. Most teachers do not feel that they can relinquish control in the curriculum to allow students to have many choices over reading materials and activities. The primary areas of student choice in reading material were in independent sustained silent reading and when doing projects such as research or book reports.
EIGHTH GRADE READING CURRICULUM:
HOW TEACHERS MAKE CHOICES

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College and Graduate School
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Current research tells us many things about reading patterns in the United States. From *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, published in 2004 by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), we know that literary reading is declining in this country. Information collected as part of the 2002 *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* found that

Literature reading is fading as a meaningful activity, especially among younger people. If one believes that active and engaged readers lead richer intellectual lives than non-readers and that a well-read citizenry is essential to a vibrant democracy, the decline of literary reading calls for serious action. (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004, p. ix)

The study cited adults ages 18-34 as exhibiting the greatest decline in literary reading. Twenty years ago this was the group most likely to read and now is the least likely to read, dropping 55% compared to that of the total adult population (Bradshaw & Nichols). Although the study suggested a wide variety of factors that may be contributing to this statistic, one factor of significance to the questions in this study is: “Young adults read much less than they used to. Making literary reading appeal to teenagers also appears to be a significant problem” (p. 26). According to the National Center for Education
Statistics, eighth grade students in Ohio report reading habits consistent with the NEA findings with students self-reporting reading as low on their list of favorite activities. Data from 2002 to 2005 report only 10% of students chose “strongly agree” in response to the survey question “reading is a favorite activity” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). An average of only 18% of the students over the same time period reported reading for fun on their own almost every day with an average of 23.6% reporting reading for fun 1 to 2 times per week (National Center for Education Statistics).

The National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP), the only national benchmark for reading progress, collects data on the proficiency of readers in grades 4, 8, and 12. Background and demographic information connected to reading behaviors are collected along with the achievement assessment. Results on the NAEP reading achievement tests are showing trends in reading that fewer students are reading at an accomplished level, the majority attaining scores at the proficient level or lower. In Ohio scores have remained relatively unchanged over the period 2002-2005 with an average of only 35% of eighth graders scoring at the proficient reading level and a mere 3.33% scoring in the proficient range (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Ohio results for 12th grade students had not been reported at the time of this study, but national data shows that 12th grade students are declining from 1992 to 2005. The percentage of 12th graders performing at the basic level dropped from 80% in 1992 to 73% in 2005. The proficient readers dropped from 40% to 35% in the same time period (International Reading Association, 2007).
As part of the NAEP assessment, when eighth grade students and their teachers are asked about the kinds of reading materials used in class and the activities that students are asked to perform with that reading material, the results may be contributing to the national trends in reading proficiency. A balanced approach to sources of reading material was reported in 2002 with 56% of teachers using both basals and trade books. But by 2005 students and teachers report relying on reading selections in textbooks and basal readers more often than the inclusion of other reading material in English/Language Arts or reading classes. In 2005 responses to “Read other than textbook for English class” show 20% reporting never or hardly ever and 23% a few times a year. Only 26% of teachers report using material other than a textbook at least once a week (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). When asked about time spent on literary appreciation and analysis the figures show that in 2005 only 21% of classrooms spent 41-60% of their time in this category down from 24% in 2002 as opposed to 38% spending the same amount of class time on reading skills and strategies, up from 19% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). In addition, teachers were asked to think about their least advanced students and most advanced students in language arts. At either end of the continuum students are asked to use a workbook or worksheet once or twice a week an average of 50% of the time. Teachers reported allowing their least advanced students choice over their reading materials almost every day 36% of the time. The most advanced students are given choices slightly less often in the same time period at 29% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). These numbers may reflect a shift in emphasis by Ohio teachers from literary appreciation to skills instruction. This leads to an area of
investigation for this study to determine where teachers are directing classroom time and resources, on appreciation of literature or on skills needed for success on achievement tests.

Further support for the idea that students are not reading material they would choose if given the opportunity, researchers Ivey and Broaddus (2001) and Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) have done extensive studies of what middle school students like to read. Their findings consistently show that what middle school students are being asked to read in school does not match what they choose to read in off hours or when given choices in other situations like free reading time. In “What Johnny Likes to Read is Hard to Find in School” Worthy et al. (1999) cited that middle school students generally prefer action/adventure novels, graphic novels, cartoon or comic books, and magazines that showcase their interests. NAEP data in Ohio supports some of the findings of these researchers. When asked in 2005 about a variety of genres, 48% of Ohio eighth graders reported reading magazines at least once a week; however, only 13% cited comic books or joke books as weekly reading material (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

In a 1993 study Applebee surveyed public, private, and parochial schools all across the United States. Applebee’s goal was to find out just what teachers were asking students to read and how that had changed since a similar study almost 30 years earlier. What Applebee found supports the conclusions of Ivey, Broaddus, Worthy, and others. In the nearly 30-year time span between the original study and Applebee’s work, virtually no titles had changed in what teachers were using in 7-12 classrooms; those texts
primarily represented the traditional canon of classic work. Titles such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Scarlett Letter* were still dominating the list of required reading from schools all over the country. The only title that had fallen out of favor over that period was *Silas Marner*. In addition, the only relatively new titles were *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Outsiders*.

In addition to what we know about reading materials and student interests, we must also acknowledge what is known about academic content standards and testing requirements. These issues play a role in what teachers and students do each day in reading and language arts classrooms. In the state of Ohio since 2001 teachers have been using a standardized curriculum that has been aligned with the testing requirements in the state. In Ohio these testing requirements along with attendance and graduation rates make up the data that are then reported to the public in the form of the local school report card. In accordance with *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) schools are required to comply with the state testing system and report performance to the public within the school district. Schools are rated on a scale from Excellent to Academic Emergency. Some of that information is also used to determine the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of the school. As outlined in NCLB schools not meeting AYP for a period of five successive years on a scale outlined in the law could eventually face sanctions as serious as a takeover by the state board of education and a complete reorganization of the school (George, 2002). In the executive summary of *No Child Left Behind*, President George W. Bush made his case for strengthening education with reading as its cornerstone by saying, “Too many of our children cannot read. Reading is the building block, and it must be the foundation, for
educational reform” (Bush, 2001, p. 4). No Child Left Behind was enacted as a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); the focus on reading lies primarily in the preschool and elementary years with programs such as Reading First and Early Reading First. The commitment is to have every child reading by third grade, to make schools accountable by implementing mandatory testing programs in reading in grades 3-8 at the state level, and to use the National Assessment of Education Progress at the national level in grades four and eight as additional data for achievement (Bush, 2001).

One question related to No Child Left Behind centers around its source of data and research to set these standards. President Bush quoted from the National Reading Panel:

Effective reading instruction teaches children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), teaching them that these sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can then be blended together to form words (phonics), having them practice what they have learned by reading aloud with guidance and feedback (guided oral reading), and applying comprehension strategies to guide and improve reading comprehension. (National Reading Panel, 2000, as quoted in Bush, 2001, p. 10)

For middle level educators, the emphasis on phonics instruction has little application, and the lack of emphasis on comprehension strategies in the middle grades compared to early reading initiatives leaves middle-level reading instruction without the same level of support. Vacca (1998) articulated this dynamic by saying,
My concern is that the local and national debates over how children learn to read and write—played out in the media and reduced to a ‘war’ between the proponents of phonics and the proponents of whole language—has bifurcated literacy by focusing almost totally on early development in elementary school, while putting on hold the literacy needs of older learners in middle and high school. (p. 605)

For middle level teachers of reading/language arts the question becomes one of the nature of reading, the purpose, and the material. What do we ask children to read in the middle grades? How do we use reading material? What is the goal of instruction? This leads to other underlying questions that have prompted this study: do we ask children to read in order to pass standardized tests? Do teachers choose reading material that they think will meet that need?

Statement of the Problem

This leads to the problem that this study addresses. We know that literary reading in the United States is declining. We know that there are roots of that problem beginning in secondary schools. We know that middle school students in particular are reporting that what they like to read and what they are asked to read in the classroom are not often compatible. We know that schools are required to participate in achievement testing in Ohio and that there is a standards-based curriculum that is aligned to that testing program. What we do not know is how teachers are making decisions related to that curriculum to make choices about reading material and reading activities in actual classrooms. This is an important issue both for practicing teachers facing the
accountability demands of *No Child Left Behind* and for teacher education and new teachers who are being prepared to enter reading classrooms. If we have a better idea of how teachers are creating the reading curriculum we can provide support for teachers who are enacting the standards-based curriculum and teach new teachers to be successful within that framework.

**Research Questions**

This study examined the following questions:

1. What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading materials and activities?
2. How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making in the district?
3. What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading/language arts?
4. What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to do with that reading material?
5. When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities?
6. How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers’ decisions changed over time?

**Definitions**

These definitions were used to guide this study.
Academic Content Standards: The knowledge and skills that students should attain. Often called the “what” of “what students should know and be able to do,” they indicate the ways of thinking, working, communicating, reasoning, and investigating the important and enduring ideas, concepts, issues, dilemmas, and knowledge essential to the discipline (Ohio Department of Education, 2001).

Activities: Any coursework, homework, or assignments created by the teacher and given to the students to respond to or engage with the reading material in the classroom for the purposes of exploration, practice, or assessment.

Adolescent Literature: According to the Commission on Adolescent Literacy, this is literature written for and chosen by children between the ages of 12-18 (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

Aesthetic Response: Directs attention to affective aspects of the text, the combination of feelings, images, sensations, and ideas that the text generates in the reader (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Curriculum Decision Making: The structure within the school district that supports curriculum decisions made by classroom teachers that may include curriculum directors, interdisciplinary teams, curriculum maps, or other curriculum documents. The result is the operational reading curriculum in the classroom.

Efferent Response: The reading from which the reader attempts to carry away a message, a fact, a new body of information (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Middle Level/Middle Grades: Middle level is the term used by the National Middle School Association to designate students ages 10-14. In this study middle grades
was used as a term for the same age group covering grades 4-9 as designated by the middle childhood license in Ohio. Middle level education follows the philosophy and organization outlined in the National Middle School Association position statement: *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (National Middle School Association, 2003).

*NAEP:* The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Known as “the Nation’s Report Card,” the NAEP is the only assessment currently in existence that assesses students from all over the United States using the same instrument.

*Reading Curriculum:* The reading material and accompanying activities taught by the teacher in the classroom for which students are held accountable, the operational or enacted curriculum based on the *Ohio Academic Content Standards* as the official curriculum.

*Report Card Ratings:* The local report card in the state of Ohio is a measure applied at both the district and building levels to measure the school’s progress toward 25 indicators which include achievement tests in grades 3-8, the Ohio Graduation Test, the district graduation rate, and the district attendance rate (Ohio Department of Education, 2006a).

*Textbooks:* Anthologies or other compilations by publishers adopted by a school building or district for classroom use.

**Assumptions**

From a procedural standpoint, one assumption of this study is that practicing classroom teachers are familiar with the *Ohio Academic Content Standards for*
English/Language Arts (Ohio Department of Education, 2001) enough that they can talk about how their lesson planning and decision making supports meeting those standards. Another similar assumption is that they are familiar with the testing requirements in the state of Ohio, specifically the eighth grade reading achievement test and that they share a goal of high student achievement on that test. A third assumption is that these teachers are honest about their practice and their choices and did not try to impress the researcher with knowledge of books or lessons that are not truly part of their curriculum. A final assumption is that teachers were willing to talk freely to the researcher about their practice without fear of retribution by central office personnel, especially in cases where they may be choosing to deviate from a prescribed curriculum of some kind within the district. The design of this study, using individual and small group interviews, fostered an open conversation. Teachers were able to share honest and thoughtful responses with the researcher and no one appeared uncomfortable talking about his or her practice.

Limitations

Because of the small sample and the limited geographical area covered by this study, this will by no means offer a theory that will apply to a broad set of circumstances. It may only be relevant to Northeast Ohio or the state of Ohio at its broadest interpretation because it is based on the statewide standards and testing program. The point of grounded theory is not to focus in generalizability (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1999) but on generating an interpretive theory that others can understand and apply and that other researchers can use to test and expand. Within the realm of grounded theory, one limitation of the study may be sample size and the ability
to reach theoretical saturation. If teachers’ responses had been too varied and wide-ranging, there may not have been common denominators to allow the generation of a theory; however, teachers’ responses were very similar in many respects and allowed themes and categories to develop for all of the research questions in this study. Many novels and short stories were used in common across all of the various teachers and schools. The only area where the responses were too varied to find themes and patterns was in response to the questionnaire where teachers were given space to include poetry, essays, and a column labeled “other.” Very few teachers listed items other than novels and short stories and for those that did, no pattern was apparent and therefore that information was not coded for analysis. In addition, this design did not include classroom observations. Therefore the researcher was not able to observe firsthand teachers practicing what they described in the interviews and must rely on the teachers’ portrayal of the school, the materials, and the activities.

Delimitations in this study included a focus only on reading material and its related activities, not on all of the language arts including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The Ohio Academic Content Standards (Ohio Department of Education, 2001) cover reading, writing, vocabulary acquisition, oral and visual communication, and research. Whereas many teachers may incorporate multiple standards in a lesson or unit that involves reading material, this study was limited to those pieces and activities that align directly with the reading standards for literary text, not informational text. Additionally, only public schools were included in this study. Although charter and community schools in Ohio are also subject to the testing program and report card
system, they were not included here. A final delimitation involved the state report card ranking. The state report card system is a tiered system rating individual buildings and overall districts. For the purposes of this study and selecting participating schools, the overall district rating was the measure used.

Subjectivity

This research was conducted at the particular schools and grade level for several reasons. In my position as a middle level teacher educator, I chose the grade level for this study to further my knowledge and understanding of children and schooling in the middle grades. I was also interested in the effect of testing programs, both state and federal, so I chose a grade level affected by those tests so that teachers’ perceptions about test performance may be used as another piece of data. Since the NAEP test is random and not administered to every school in the country, I was not able to study a school where the *NAEP Grade 8 Reading Assessment* was given.

Using the concept of the “subjective I” as outlined by Peshkin (1991), I have identified the following I’s in this research:

1. The teacher-educator I—the more I learn from this study about how teachers choose classroom reading material and how students respond to it, the better I can prepare my candidates to make good choices in their own classrooms.

2. The avid-reader adolescent I—as an adolescent I was an avid reader of adolescent literature and would identify strongly with particular authors and characters. I wonder what happens to students who do not find that same fascination and satisfaction in reading. I also want to know why teachers choose
to use or not to use such literature. Is it availability? Cost? Curriculum standards? Knowledge base? Familiarity with the genre? Cultural literacy? Student interest?

3. The avid-reader adult I—I still love to read and cherish the times I get to choose my reading material as opposed to something I am required to read either as an assignment in graduate studies or because I am preparing for my own teaching.

4. The constructivist I—as a teacher and a researcher I would label myself as a constructivist (Fosnot, 1996). I am seeking to make meaning from what the teachers say and do as I interview them.

5. The doctoral student I—ultimately, this is not an experience entirely within my control. I am researching and writing for a committee that must approve of my work and pass judgment in awarding my degree. Being a doctoral student also makes me a novice researcher. I am learning a process of qualitative research as I participate in this research.

Significance

The questions guiding my study are important based on current knowledge; we have national data about trends in reading material and test scores, but few if any studies that are linking these ideas together in the current climate of NCLB requirements, particularly at the middle level. This study has resulted in an interpretive theory regarding how teachers are making decisions about reading curriculum to meet state and federal standards and guidelines and discovered what reading material they have chosen to use and why they have chosen those pieces. It also examined any areas where students have
choice in the reading curriculum. It will inform the profession in light of current practice and provide data that other researchers may replicate in other areas of the state or the country to broaden our understanding of the ways these reading curriculum decisions are made. It may also serve teacher education in helping pre-service teacher candidates better understand how experienced teachers are making curriculum decisions to meet curriculum standards and testing requirements.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine the decision-making process of eighth grade reading/language arts teachers relative to the reading materials and activities that they plan for their students. Included in these decisions are the teachers’ choices of reading materials and activities and areas in the curriculum where students have choices. The decisions have been examined in light of the current educational climate of a state-wide standards-based curriculum and achievement testing program. In the next chapter, these issues have been grounded in research on a variety of areas related to the research questions including engaging readers through choice and interest, reader-response theory, curriculum theory and the state standards, and adolescent literature.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The results of *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004) suggest that one factor contributing to the decline in literary reading in the United States is young adults are not reading as much as they used to and that there is a problem in making reading appealing to this population. This chapter is organized around several aspects of education that may be contributing factors to adolescents’ reading experiences in schools and how teachers approach reading in the classroom.

Choice and Interest in Reading Material

In their 1998 position statement on adolescent literacy, the International Reading Association’s Commission on Adolescent Literacy outlined seven principles for supporting literacy growth in adolescents. Of those seven, the first involved access to reading material that students are capable of reading and choose to read (Moore et al., 1999). As early as 1923 Dora V. Smith, a foundational writer in the field of adolescent literature, and her coauthors realized the connection between interest and engagement with texts and success in literature study. In a monograph titled *Illustrative Material for High School Literature* (1923) the authors compiled an extensive bibliographic reference citing materials that they felt would help teachers create interest in reading. The titles were classics by authors ranging from Addison to Hawthorne, to Shakespeare, and
Whitman, but the editions they cited were either written, illustrated, or edited in a way that the authors felt would be more appealing to adolescents and thus create more interest in the reading (Hilson, Wheeling, & Smith, 1923).

Choice and interest are part of the data collected during assessments performed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) when administering the NAEP reading test to eighth grade students across the country. Known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” the National Assessment of Educational Progress is the only assessment currently in existence that can assess students from all over the United States using the same instrument. A test of reading achievement is given annually to a sample of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students from across the country and includes assessments in the contexts of literary experiences, reading for information, and reading to perform a task. Four other aspects of reading that are assessed include understanding, interpretation, connection, and structure (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). In addition to the performance on the contexts and aspects of reading, background questionnaires gather additional data on reading habits and behaviors, conditions and settings in the school, resources in both the home and school related to reading, and demographic data on the school and its population. All of these data are self-reported either from students, teachers, or school administrators (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Data are gathered on a variety of genres of reading done by students outside of school ranging from fiction books to magazines to Internet articles. When asked if they read for fun on their own, 31% of Ohio eighth graders in 2005 responded “never” or “hardly ever;” only 17% responded with “almost every day.” In 2002 the surveys collected data on the diversity of
genre in reading materials with only 35% of respondents acknowledging diversity of genres in reading experience. That figure narrows to 26% when the reading experience is specified as fiction (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

The National Endowment for the Arts report titled *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* provided an interpretation of data collected through the *2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* and compared it to data collected in 1982 and 1992 to arrive at the conclusion that literary reading is declining significantly in our society and most rapidly among younger Americans (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004). This study focused on the adult population but holds significance for this research. If students are not exposed to reading material that stimulates interest and resulting reading achievement when they are young, the connection to literary reading is less likely to be fostered as an adult. Worthy et al. (1999) helped to make this point as they investigated the connection between reading preferences, attitude, and achievement. Their findings support the trend established by the NEA that school materials do not hold the interest of middle grades students; thus there is a decline in reading as an activity, which may influence a decline in reading achievement. Although students in this study did exhibit preferences in reading material such as comic books and scary stories, those preferences were not found to be in alignment with classroom use or school library offerings (Worthy et al., 1999). Magazines, adventure books, mysteries, and scary stories topped the list in Ivey and Broaddus’ (2001) survey of reading preferences of middle grades students, but this study also showed a disconnect between these types of reading material and classroom reading requirements. Bookstores and public libraries as opposed to
classrooms, classroom libraries, and school libraries were the most frequently cited places to access preferred reading material in both studies.

Choice and Interest Through Stages of Development

Interest in reading material can be traced to improvements in reading achievement as early as second grade. Morrow (1992) conducted a study using basal readers and a literature-based program with minority students and found gains in both achievement and interest for students using a literature-based program. Baker and Wigfield (1999) continued this line of inquiry with their study of fifth and sixth graders and, in addition to finding a relationship between motivation and achievement, created categories of motivation. Within these categories, motivation was affected by interest and interest was affected by attitude. Baker and Wigfield found the relationship between motivation and achievement to be significant, especially in terms of the population under consideration, which represented students who began the study reading well below national grade level norms.

Schraw, Flowerday, and Reisetter’s (1998) study of college students who either selected or were assigned reading material further supported achievement gains based on interest and motivation. This study compared results on three cognitive measures, a multiple-choice test, thematic inferences, and critical responses. Although subjects in this case did not show differences in cognitive measures, the choice group reported more positive reactions about the experience and more favorable attitudes as reported on an attitude survey than did those who were not afforded a choice in reading material. Several reasons may have contributed to the lack of influence on cognitive measures. This study
was conducted with adult readers and the perception of choice was somewhat artificial in terms of the subjects’ perceptions of real choice versus choice from a predetermined set of readings. However, attitude and interest were shown to have been positively influenced by choice, and therefore results of this study support other research cited in this review as promoting choice in reading material. The research in this section traces choice and interest through several developmental stages that all cite increased choice and interest in reading material as having a positive effect on reading achievement.

Choice, Interest, and Persistence

If students in many of these studies are reporting that the required reading material in textbooks is different from the types of reading material (comic books, scary stories, etc.) that they are citing on interest surveys as preferences, then what ultimate effect does this have on reading achievement scores? Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff (2002) added to the question the concept of persistence. They studied eighth and ninth grade students in Australia and Canada to explore not only the effects of interest on reading materials, but also to calculate how interest affected persistence to complete the reading task using both a computer program and paper and pencil measures. The findings supported others cited here: Interest plays a key role not only in comprehension and motivation, but also in persistence to finish the reading requirement. Interest and persistence play a key role in learning (Ainley et al.).

Lack of interest and its resulting lack of persistence proved to be a major factor in Hunt’s (2001) comparison of traditional and adolescent literature in the classroom. It proved so difficult to maintain motivation to read a text that students found difficult and
boring that the teacher had to alter reading assignments, provide reading guides, and skip sections of text thick with description and lean on plot development to maintain enough interest to persuade students to finish the study of *Jane Eyre*. This was not the case when the same students were asked to read *Romiette and Julio*, a work of adolescent literature by Sharon Draper. If those are the reading experiences students are having in middle and high school, and as Applebee (1993) concluded that reading material in secondary classrooms is not changing to keep pace with students’ interests or the available market of new titles, it certainly supports the NEA’s findings in young adults ages 18-34 as the population of steepest decline from those once most likely to read literature, to the current position of the least likely in our society to read (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004).

The research on choice and interest can guide teachers to allow students to have choices over their reading material with the goal of creating interest in reading and raising reading achievement. If choice and interest were the only factors when designing a reading curriculum, it would signal the end of this discussion. However, other aspects must be considered, including state and federal regulations and accountability systems. These issues are examined in the next section.

**No Child Left Behind, Content Standards, and Accountability**

President George W. Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) into law in January 2002. This law created a new focus in education that was to be centered on accountability and standards-based education. Four guiding principles of the legislation are outlined as follows:

1. Stronger accountability for results
2. Increased flexibility and local control

3. More information and options for parents

4. Emphasis on proven education methods (George, 2002).

Because of the emphasis on accountability and the need for local control, it is the responsibility of the states to set academic standards at all levels of K-12 education and create an accountability system that regularly assesses student achievement towards meeting those standards. In Ohio, the Academic Content Standards have been the basis to align the accountability measures required by NCLB for many areas of the curriculum, including the English Language Arts which is the focus of this study. Ohio has also implemented a testing program that includes reading as one section of the Ohio Graduation Test in grade 10 and achievement testing in reading in grades 3-8 to assess the progress on the grade level benchmarks (Ohio Department of Education, 2006b).

The Ohio Academic Content Standards were adopted in December 2001 after an extensive development process involving teachers, parents, university educators, employers, and community members through several stages of drafts and reviews and alignment with national professional organization standards set by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (Ohio Department of Education, 2006d). The final document outlines 10 standards:

1. Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition and Fluency Standard

2. Acquisition of Vocabulary Standard

Content standards are defined by the Ohio Department of Education as

The knowledge and skills that students should attain—often called the ‘what’ of ‘what students should know and be able to do.’ They indicate the ways of thinking, working, communicating, reasoning, and investigating the important and enduring ideas, concepts, issues, dilemmas, and knowledge essential to the discipline. (Ohio Department of Education, 2006a)

To study all 10 standards would have been too broad for the research questions in this study. Because of the focus in the research questions on student choices and the grounding in the literature in reader response theories, this study focused on the “Reading Applications: Literary Text” standard. The academic content standards are subdivided into benchmarks and indicators. Benchmarks are defined as “the specific component of the knowledge or skill identified by an academic content, performance, or operational standard. It can be characterized as being declarative, procedural, or contextual in the type of knowledge it describes” (Ohio Department of Education, 2006a). This study
focuses on eighth grade classrooms. The benchmarks for “Reading Applications: Literary Text” in grade eight are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Reading Applications: Literary Text Benchmarks*

| A. | Analyze interactions between characters in literary text and how the interactions affect the plot. |
| B. | Explain and analyze how the context of setting and the author’s choice of point of view impact a literary text. |
| C. | Identify the structural elements of the plot and explain how an author develops conflicts and plot to pace the events in literary text. |
| D. | Identify similar recurring themes across different works. |
| E. | Analyze the use of a genre to express a theme or topic. |
| F. | Identify and analyze how an author uses figurative language, sound devices and literary techniques to shape plot, set meaning and develop tone. |
| G. | Explain techniques used by authors to develop style. |


Grade level indicators are defined as “what students should know and be able to do. The indicators are the checkpoints that monitor progress toward the benchmarks”
The grade eight indicators for the “Reading Applications: Literary Text” standard are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Reading Applications: Literary Text Grade Level Indicators

1. Identify and explain various types of characters (e.g., flat, round dynamic, static) and how their interactions and conflicts affect the plot.
2. Analyze the influence of setting in relation to other literary elements.
3. Explain how authors pace action and use subplots, parallel episodes and climax.
4. Compare and contrast different points of view (e.g., first person and third person limited, omniscient, objective and subjective), and explain how voice affects literary text.
5. Identify and explain universal themes across different works by the same author and by different authors.
6. Explain how an author’s choice of genre affects the expression of theme or topic.
7. Identify examples of foreshadowing and flashback in a literary text.
8. Explain ways in the author conveys mood and tone through word choice, figurative language, and syntax.
9. Examine symbols used in literary texts.

Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2001, p. 65
Schools and teachers are being held accountable to these content standards, benchmarks, and indicators through achievement tests in grades three through eight and the *Ohio Graduation Test* in grade 10, which students must pass to earn a high school diploma. In addition, the results on these tests combined with other data make up the local report card and determine whether or not schools have met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as outlined by NCLB.

The local report card in the state of Ohio is a measure applied at both the district and building levels to measure the school’s progress toward 25 indicators, which include achievement tests in grades 3-8, the *Ohio Graduation Test*, the district graduation rate, and the district attendance rate (Ohio Department of Education, 2006c). The Ohio Department of Education defines school and district ratings as a

Rating based on the higher of the percentage of report card indicators met or the performance index score (PI) and whether the AYP goals were met for the year. The ratings are Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch or Academic Emergency. (Ohio Department of Education, 2006c)

The performance index score is defined by

A weighted average of your school or district’s assessment results across all tested grades and all subjects based on the performance levels of untested, below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. The percentage of students at each performance level is multiplied by 1.2 (advanced) 1.0 (proficient), .6 (basic), .3 (below basic), or 0 (untested), and the products are summed. The score is on a scale of 0 to 120 points with 100 being the goal. (Ohio Department of Education, 2006c)
In accordance with NCLB, Ohio releases local school report card information to the public in August of each year. The 2005-06 designations, which were in effect when this study took place, are defined as:

1. Excellent districts meet 24 or 25 indicators, or 100 or above on the Performance Index (PI).
2. Effective meet 19 to 23 indicators or score 90 to 99.9 on the PI.
3. Continuous Improvement meets 13 to 18 indicators or 80 to 89.9 on the PI OR they meet AYP (the lowest a district can be rated if they meet AYP is CI).
4. Academic Watch districts meet 9 to 12 indicators or score 70 to 79.9 and have missed AYP.
5. Academic Emergency districts are those that met 8 or fewer indicators, scored less than 70 and missed AYP. (Ohio Department of Education, 2006c)

There is very little research on the testing and accountability system in the state of Ohio. Most research that does exist was completed prior to the shift in Ohio from the Ohio Proficiency Test to the current Ohio Graduation Test, and no research is available that examines the achievement tests separately. Research and data gathering have focused on several topics: test performance, teacher professionalism, and the quality of the content standards. On the topic of test performance, Hoover (2000) examined factors affecting performance on the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT). Hoover examined data on 593 of 611 public school districts in 1997 and concluded that performance on the OPT is most significantly related to the socio-economic status of the students and that test results based on the range of performance across all income levels lack validity in assessing
performance. In addition, because proficiency and other test data were and are the majority of the data used to report performance on the local report card, that measure was found equally invalid in this study (Hoover).

Kubow and DeBard (2000) focused on one high-performing district in Ohio and examined the teacher’s perceptions of the proficiency testing and its relationship to teacher professionalism. The researchers defined a professional environment in part by the degree to which teachers have the opportunity to make decisions that influence student learning. The results of this study “strongly [suggest] that teacher professional autonomy and consideration of children’s holistic development have been sacrificed for state-mandated educational accountability” (p. 18). Teachers in this study generally agreed that more time and attention are given annually to proficiencies to help students meet standards and 85% of eighth grade teachers believed that proficiency testing has increased the teacher work load (Kubow & DeBard). Ninety-four percent of teachers in this school district agreed that the testing program has resulted in a school curriculum aligned to the testing, but no mention of content standards was made as this study was conducted before the implementation of the current standards documents.

As part of the NAEP data collection in 2002, teachers in Ohio were surveyed for information on multiple connections to content standards. Among the factors surveyed, 57% of teachers said they got adequate materials to implement the standards, 47% agreed that they get adequate training in the use of the standards, 75% agree that the standards address important content, and 63% agreed that the standards are clear enough to be useful. When asked about the state accountability system motivating teachers only 22%
agreed that the test was a motivating factor for students, 31% agreed that the assessment has a positive impact on students, and 54% agreed that preparation for the test takes too much time. Ninety-seven percent of teachers report using the language arts standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

In a review of standards in 49 of 50 states (Iowa had no standards at the time of this review), Stotsky reviewed Ohio’s *Academic Content Standards English Language Arts* and awarded the state of Ohio a “C,” the same grade it was given in 2003 (Stotsky, 2005). Stotsky used a rubric and criteria to evaluate the English/language arts/reading standards of all 49 states and the District of Columbia that have implemented standards and determined a score, which was then converted into a letter grade for comparison between states. Ohio was found to be high in the categories of covering the discipline and organization, but weak in purposes, expectations, and quality. One area cited as a weakness that related to questions in this research involves literary study. One measure of comparison for the states looks at both content-rich and content-specific standards. Content-specific standards are those that address specific texts, authors, time periods or eras, and cultures as representing the body of literature study. For example, Louisiana is regarded in this evaluation as having the most content-specific grade level expectations naming authors including Homer, Shakespeare, and Sophocles, time periods such as the Renaissance, and American and British Literature (Stotsky, 2005). Ohio has no such designations in its content standards.

The most serious omission [in Ohio] is a group of content-rich and content-specific standards pointing to key authors, works, literary periods, and literary
traditions in classical, British, and American literature that outline the essential content of the secondary English curriculum. (Stotsky, 2005, p. 59)

This finding has led to one of the central questions in this study: If the content standards do not specify or prescribe any standard reading material, then how are teachers making decision about what they ask students to read?

Content standards may not specify what titles students should be reading, but they do specify what students need to know about reading material and on what they will be tested. *No Child Left Behind* and its measurement of Adequate Yearly Progress have created a high-stakes environment where school districts and teachers are being held accountable for performance on a reading achievement test, among others, and those results are made public each year to parents and community members. This leaves teachers and administrators to construct a reading curriculum that covers the content standards and prepares students for the tests. The next section examines curriculum theory and how those goals might be met.

**Curriculum Theory**

In his book *Analyzing the Curriculum*, Posner (1992) divided the term “curriculum” into five concurrent curricula: the official curriculum, the operational curriculum, the hidden curriculum, the null curriculum, and the extra curriculum. By Posner’s definitions, this study examines the official and the operational reading curricula in selected Northeast Ohio classrooms. Posner defined the official curriculum as the Written curriculum, documented in scope and sequence charts, syllabi, curriculum guides, course outlines, and lists of objectives. Its purpose is to give teachers a
basis for planning lessons and evaluating students, and administrators a basis for
supervising teachers and holding them accountable for their practices and results.
(Posner, 1992, p. 10)

Currently in Ohio this written curriculum is represented primarily by the *Ohio
Academic Content Standards*. Often school districts use a district or building level
curriculum based on the benchmarks and indicators from the content standards. Some
schools may have created a scope and sequence chart or a curriculum map to follow that
divides the benchmarks and indicators throughout each grading period (Jacobs, 1997),
but ultimately when Posner’s (1992) definition described the official curriculum as that
which allows administrators to hold teachers accountable, in this case through the
achievement testing system, teachers are held accountable to the written *Ohio Academic
Content Standards*.

The questions in this study did not focus on the official curriculum, since the
content standards are clear. The central questions of this study focus on another of
Posner’s five curricula, the operational curricula defined as “(1) the content included and
emphasized by the teacher in class, i.e., what the teacher teaches, and (2) the learning
outcomes for which students are actually held responsible, i.e., what counts” (Posner,
1992, pp. 10-11). The content standards are part of public record for any interested party,
researcher, teacher, parent, or school board member to read. What is not public is what
goes on in the day-to-day classroom: the content for which each teacher emphasizes,
uses, teaches, and holds students responsible. It is what is ultimately supposed to be
measured by the achievement test. This is the central focus of this study.
There are also elements of Posner’s (1992) hidden curriculum embedded in some of the questions in this study. As teachers are asked about when and how students are given choices in the reading curriculum and as this study is linked conceptually to research on the decline of literary reading in the United States and research concerning interest, motivation, and choice in reading, we are delving into the part of the curriculum that is “not generally acknowledged by school officials but may have a deeper and more durable impact on students than either the official or the operational curriculum” (Posner, p. 11). In this case it is the value, or lack thereof, of literary reading in the United States.

Applebee (1993) described the literature curriculum as a list of required readings, usually from an anthology, that features a selection of short stories, poetry, essays, and usually one full-length play and one full-length (although possibly edited) novel. These anthologies are arranged either by theme or genre, or chronologically through the historical development of British or American literature. In support of other data in this study, Applebee cited 63% of teachers surveyed reported that the literature anthology was the main source of reading material and that in grades 7-10 the curriculum organization favored genres.

In another study, Applebee (2003) divided effective language learning into three components: the teacher, conceptions of the students, and the curriculum. Here curriculum is defined as “a translation of the teacher’s goals and perceptions of students’ needs into specific content and activities” (p. 677) similar to Posner’s operational definition. This definition also has merit in this study as interview and questionnaire
items focused on the teacher’s goals for choosing particular reading selections and the activities that accompany those selections.

Finally, Harste (1994) defined the “enacted curriculum” as the teacher’s attempt to operationalize his or her vision of what to do in the classroom. Although in today’s standards-based climate that vision may not be left entirely up to the teacher, that vision can still be the teacher’s conception of how best to enact the content standards. Therefore the enacted curriculum is how the teacher operationalizes the content standards to meet the goal of the accountability system.

The term “curriculum” is broad and is defined in many ways. This study focuses on operational or enacted curriculum. The operational curriculum can take a variety of forms. One form is that of a school-wide or district-wide curriculum map.

**Curriculum Mapping**

Curriculum mapping is a tool used by school districts to align curriculum across and between grades level. English (1980) called a curriculum map, “a reconstruction of the real curriculum teachers have taught” (p. 558). Jacobs (1997) outlined the need for a curriculum structure that informs teachers at the classroom, school, and district level of the operational curriculum as students experience it K-12. Jacobs wrote

To make sense of our students’ experiences over time, we need two lenses: a zoom lens into this year’s curriculum for a particular grade and a wide-angle lens to see the K-12 perspective. The classroom (or micro) level is dependent on the site and the district level (a macro view). (p. 3)
To provide the micro level construction Jacobs outlined a process that begins with the individual teachers using a calendar-based system to map out the topics, the standards, and the skills they will cover in a given school year. Then through a process of meetings at grade and building levels, a comprehensive map is generated to create a picture of a student’s experience at that school in each grade level. Throughout this process, teachers meet in varying groups to review, revise, and refine the maps to make better sense of the curriculum structure. Concepts that lend themselves to interdisciplinary study are grouped together. Overlaps in skills or concepts are removed or reconfigured. Gaps in content or concepts are identified and filled. Jacobs described the finished product as “a school’s manuscript. It tells the story of the operational curriculum. With this map in hand, staff members can play the role of editors, examining the curriculum for needed revision and validation” (1997, p. 17). According to English (1980) curriculum mapping does not lead to a new curriculum, but a description of the current curriculum as it exists. The task when mapping the curriculum is to make the written curriculum such as curriculum guides, book lists, or standards documents, and the operational curriculum “more congruent with one another” (p. 559).

Mills (2003) wrote about one school’s process with curriculum mapping and its application to professional development. His school district in Sheridan, Arkansas, mapped the entire high school curriculum, but they did not view that as the end of the process. Rather, they see curriculum mapping as “a dynamic and data-driven model of learning” (p. 1). Following the model set forth by Jacobs (1997), this district began by asking individual teachers to use a calendar-based system to outline their operational
curriculum. They used available computer resources such as document templates and databases to create a single map that outlined the school-wide curriculum and used a formatted lesson plan. Teacher reflection continued the process (Mills, 2003). The project of creating the initial map took one academic year to complete, and it became a source of organization and reflection for the teachers in that district.

Jacobs (1991) used calendar-based planning as a way to lay the groundwork for interdisciplinary instruction. Beginning with the map, teachers are able to “align subjects that would mutually benefit from concurrent teaching . . . [and] eliminate repetition from year to year” (p. 27). With that information, teachers can create interdisciplinary units. In addition to interdisciplinary instruction, Koppang (2004) described other benefits of curriculum mapping as

- Increased collaboration and communication among teachers ultimately benefits the students. As the curriculum alignment is achieved, students’ educational experiences are enhanced. The curriculum is more coherent and clear for building knowledge and skills. In addition, instruction becomes more closely aligned to the state and district standards on which students will be tested. Finally, as teachers share information about what they teach, they begin to dialogue and share effective instructional strategies. (p. 157)

Curriculum mapping is a way for schools and districts to align curriculum, improve practice, and create a more cohesive educational experience for students K-12. By beginning with a calendar-based method of organizing instruction, teachers and instructional leaders are able to examine current instruction in light of content standards,
testing requirements, and student needs and align all of those interests into a larger plan for instruction.

A curriculum map may be created by a single school or an entire district. Once it is completed, it may be enacted by individual teachers in a departmentalized setting or, especially in middle schools, it may be enacted by a team of teachers. The next section examines the characteristics of teams of teachers in middle level schools.

Teaming

The National Middle School Association’s (NMSA) position statement *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (2003) outlined the components of essential middle level education for young adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14. One of those essential components is teaming and it is foundational to creating “organizational structures that promote meaningful relationships and learning” (NMSA, 2003, p. 29). The Carnegie Foundation report *Turning Points 2000 Educating Adolescents for the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) supports the National Middle School Association position by saying, “The hallmark of an effective team is its ability to focus sustained attention on coordinating the curriculum and improving teaching strategies” (p. 141). Both publications agree that there is not one right way to create effective teams, but there are necessary essential elements such as planning time and team size.

Teams of teachers in middle schools can be arranged in a variety of configurations, interdisciplinary teams, grade level teams, or partner teams. Much of the research focus in the past 30 years has been on interdisciplinary teams. The general
definition of interdisciplinary teams is “two or more teachers [who] share a common planning time, as well as students, a common teaching schedule and an area of the building” (Erb, 1997, p. 309). Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999) defined them as “a group of teachers from different subject areas who plan and work together and who share the same students for a significant period of time” (p. 58). Interdisciplinary teams are usually comprised of four to six teachers beginning with the core subjects of language arts, math, science, and social studies. Some teams may also include such stakeholders as related arts teachers (music, physical education, visual arts), intervention specialists, schools counselors, and even librarians (Erb & Stevenson, 1999).

In middle schools that employ successful teaming, teachers have regular and sustained individual and team planning time. Erb and Stevenson (1999) cited that “teams that meet four or five times per week for at least 45 minutes each time have a greater impact than do those that meet less often or for shorter periods of time” (p. 47). Flowers (2000) supported that conclusion by listing the three most critical components of a team structure as common planning time, the number of students on a team, and the length of time the team has worked together. Common planning time is crucial if teachers are to develop rapport with one another as well as interdisciplinary units, common assessments, and work together to communicate with parents. Flowers included the number of students on a team as another significant factor of team success. Her research identified teams of 90 students or fewer as the optimal team size. Flowers et al. (1999) asserted that schools that team have higher achievement scores than schools that do not based on a study of seventh grade results on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.
In addition to small teams, appropriate individual and team planning time, and close physical proximity in the school building, *Turning Points* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) also included allowing teachers the freedom to design the bulk of the students’ learning and continuity over time as important factors in team success. All of these elements combine to make teaming an essential component of middle level philosophy that benefits both teachers and students.

Up to this point, this review has focused on the essential curricular elements in this study, choice and interest as a beginning to motivate students to read and lead to improved achievement, then to the state and federal guidelines that must also be part of the decision-making process. The literature on curriculum theory and curriculum mapping set those decisions in a context of the operational versus the official curriculum; one way of creating the operational curriculum is through curriculum mapping. Interdisciplinary teaming was discussed as a way teachers may map the curriculum and as a means of enacting the curriculum on a day-to-day basis, especially in middle schools. The following section focuses on what might be a part of that curriculum, the reading material itself.

**Adolescent Literature**

No one succinct definition of adolescent literature is widely accepted within the field. Many authors cite their own sets of characteristics, foundational works, and notable authors. Not only do authors differ on their definitions of adolescent literature, there is even debate over the term itself. Terms such as *young adult literature*, *YA literature*, *teen fiction*, *juvenile literature*, and *junior novel* have all been used to describe books written
for an audience ages 12-18. Although the term *young adult literature* tends to dominate the field, this study used the term adolescent literature to encompass material written for this age group because of the focus on ages 12-18. Such a span in age and developmental level precludes the use of the term *young adult* to refer to preteens. The term *adolescence* is an acceptable term in educational psychology for this age range, although even adolescence is often divided into early and late (Ormrod, 2002). The term *adolescent* was applied to the literature and definition in this study.

Adolescent literature is literature written for and chosen by children between the ages of 12-18 (Moore et al., 1999). There is an important distinction in this study between “written for” and “chosen by.” Literature written for this age range has many defining characteristics (Moore et al.). The first is that the protagonist(s) is within the same age range as the intended reader. Although most novels have only one protagonist, there are novels that are beginning to explore group dynamics of this age level with multiple main characters. Another defining characteristic is that the adolescent protagonist takes center stage. The adolescent is at the center of the conflict and its resolution with little adult intervention. As a consequence, parents or other significant adults may be underdeveloped, minor characters (Reed, 1994). Donelson and Nilsen (2005) were more prescriptive in their definition of this characteristic citing that the adolescent needs the credit for resolving the conflict. In order for the protagonist to be the center of the plot, the author must in some way lessen or remove the influence of adults in the child’s life. Without strong adults for role models and guidance, the author takes on an additional burden as a storyteller. With many of the sophisticated themes in adolescent literature and
coming-of-age novels, there is a responsibility on the part of the author to resolve the conflict in a way that provides hope for the reader and that remains optimistic (Donelson & Nilsen). Coming-of-age novels describe the period of becoming an adult and can include rites of passage and transitions in the life of the character that mark this period of adolescent development (Reed, 1994); therefore, not every piece of adolescent literature has a “happily ever after” resolution. Often the main character overcomes a serious obstacle and retains hope for the future. Reed noted the use of a single plot line as a common characteristic of adolescent literature, however; this is beginning to shift in current novels. Another important feature is heavy use of dialogue. Both Reed (1994) and Donelson and Nilsen (2005) cited fast-moving plots, regardless of the number, as a hallmark of adolescent literature.

Adolescent literature is only one component of the operational reading curriculum. Another component involves what teachers ask students to do as they read, how students are asked to respond. Reader-response theory outlines different modes of response that may be involved in the operational curriculum.

Reader-Response Theory

In 1938 Louise Rosenblatt published her first edition of *Literature as Exploration* and created a new theory from which to approach the study of literature, that of reader-response theory. Unfortunately, that theory was often disregarded by much of the world of literary criticism and pedagogy for most of the 20th century in favor of the New Critics and their much more “scientific” study of literature relating to analysis of elements and style and finding the one true reading, and if students did not find it, teachers told them
what it was supposed to be (Rosenblatt, 1995). Post-World War II era thinking, reinforced decades later with Sputnik, the race to the moon, and the push for more scientific thinking and inquiry left precious little room for individual interpretation and response. But as Wayne Booth says in his forward to the fifth edition of *Literature as Exploration*,

Demanding that teachers think constantly of “the relationship between the individual student and the book”—that is, of the transaction between potentially powerful text and readers whose emotional engagement should be ‘read’ as closely as the text itself—Rosenblatt offered correction, too often ignored for too long, of the exaggeration committed by successive enthusiasts. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. viii)

Rosenblatt (1995), Gibson (1950), Prince (1973), and others did not let the idea of a transaction between reader and texts go quietly into the night; they continued, in their various forms and voices, to promote the notion that a reader interacts with a text to create personal meaning. That meaning is influenced by personal experience, memory, position in life, age, and maturity, and can vary from reading to reading and that meaning is created by engagement with text.

The reader is an essential element in reader-response theory. Whereas the role of reader is labeled and conceived differently by different writers, in reader-response theory, the reader is at the center. Rosenblatt put the reader at the center of her theory when she said, “A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols” (1995, p. 24). She also invoked the
spirit of John Dewey in choosing the term “transaction” for this process to represent the reciprocity between reader and text. Rosenblatt made the correlation between her ideas and those of Dewey; they were both first published in the pre-war climate of 1938.

Gerald Prince (1973) referred to the reader, the virtual reader, and the narratee. The reader holds the book in hand, across a knee, and reads the work. Connecting to adolescent literature, this is the “chosen by” part of the definition, referring to the reader curled up with a book of his or her selection. The virtual reader is the author’s conception of his or her public. The author “bestows with certain qualities, faculties, and inclinations according to his opinion of men in general (or in particular) and according to the obligations he feels should be respected” (p. 9). When we make the distinction in the earlier definition of adolescent literature as that “written for” ages 12-18, we are coming near Prince’s concept of author and his or her conception of audience distinct from those works primarily written for an adult audience. The narratee, created by the author, is a fictitious character that may bear resemblance to the reader or the virtual reader, but is created by the author. The narratee is addressed by the author, either directly or indirectly, understands the language and syntax used by the author, but may lack a larger worldview or past experience with which to interpret events. That interpretation is left to the reader. The narratee acts as intermediary between narrator and reader or author and reader. In the case of adolescent literature, this is the adolescent protagonist, living within the confines of his or her world created by the author, and communicating that experience to the reader through the transaction of reader-response.
Once we have characterized the reader, the next step is to characterize the response. Various authors discussed the response to reading, the result of what Rosenblatt called the transaction. Others such as Beach (1993) referred to this as the reader’s stance, but continued to adopt Rosenblatt’s terminology of *efferent* and *aesthetic* when describing the reader’s stance or the focus of the reader’s attention. Beach defined stance as “a reader’s orientation or frame of responding to a text that reflects a certain set of attitudes or critical strategies” (p. 164). Hade called stance, “one of the foundations upon which humans make and communicate meaning” (1992, p. 194). In any case, stance involves what the reader brings to the text that helps form the reader’s reaction, connection, and response to what is being read.

To begin a discussion of reader-response theory, we must examine Rosenblatt’s conception of the two terms *efferent* and *aesthetic*, originally introduced in her 1938 edition of *Literature as Exploration*. Because of her study in France, Rosenblatt drew heavily in her works on examples from French literature and created the term *efferent* from the French word *efferre*, which means, “to carry away” (1995, p. 32). The efferent response is the reading from which the reader attempts to carry away a message, a fact, a new body of information. The efferent response is often associated with nonfiction reading, such as newspapers, textbooks, research studies, and so forth, that we read to gain factual information. The second kind of response according to Rosenblatt is the *aesthetic* response. The aesthetic response is defined as one that directs attention to affective aspects of the text, the combination of feelings, images, sensations, and ideas that the text generates in the reader (Rosenblatt).
Joyce Many (1994) studied these definitions of stance as eighth grade students described their reactions to literature, to analyze the relationship between stance and understanding, and to analyze that relationship across individual texts. Many found empirical support for the aesthetic stance, even when students were asked to take a more efferent stance, analyzing literature for elements such as plot, setting, and so on. Many determined that the efferent stance must be examined in light of the aesthetic response, a position she cited as underscored by Rosenblatt. Many developed an “efferent-to-aesthetic continuum” to measure stance, and responses were rated accordingly and an analysis of variances was conducted for each of three short stories used. Her findings showed that responses generated from an aesthetic stance were associated with significantly higher levels of understanding. These results were significant across all three text selections used in the study (Many, 1994).

Several researchers have studied the concept of intertextuality in relation to the reader’s stance. Beach relied heavily on Rabinowitz (as cited in Beach, 1993) to discuss the concept of stance in terms of intertextuality. He defines intertextuality as “an interest in not only the author’s references to other texts, but also reader’s use of other related texts and genre conventions to respond to the current text” (Beach, p. 164). In other words, to create stance, not only does the reader draw upon attitudes and critical strategies, but also conventions of print and genre that guide the reader’s interpretation and response. He cited four “rules” that readers employ, to help create their relationship to the text and to the stance: rules of notice, rules of signification, rules of configuration, and rules of coherence (Beach). These rules consist of readers knowing conventions, such
as titles, and opening scenes (rules of notice); inferring significance in character actions or setting to interpret the story (rules of significance); recognizing patterns to predict outcomes (rules of configuration); and bringing the various parts into a picture of the work as a whole (rules of coherence; Beach 1993). Beyond these textual aspects, Beach also discussed conventions of genre and form as being necessary for the reader to respond to in order to create a stance based on the reading.

A comparison with the reading achievement categories assessed by the NAEP suggests an overlap with some of Beach’s (1993) characteristics or skills of readers. The NAEP assessment includes assessments related to a student’s understanding of structure (rules of notice), the contexts of literary experiences (rules of significance), interpretation (rules of configuration) and connection (rules of coherence) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Rosenblatt (1995) saw far-reaching implications for reader response theory in the classroom. She made numerous references to the adolescent and his or her response to literature. She talked about students being moved by a work of literature to question the world around them. This questioning brings forth a whole host of dichotomies, social/antisocial, just/unjust, right/wrong/ equal/unequal that students begin to debate, discuss, and realize for themselves through the response to experiencing these issues in literature. “In books they are meeting extremely compelling images of life that will undoubtedly influence the crystallization of their ultimate attitudes, either of acceptance or rejection” (Rosenblatt, p. 19). Young adolescents need to find those compelling images in books that they can relate to, that have main characters similar to them in age
and experiences. Similarity of experience does not always imply contemporary realistic fiction. Science fiction, fantasy, and historical fiction with protagonists who are not adults can provide vicarious experiences as well. It is the vicarious experience of reader, becoming an active participant in the story, seeing and feeling with the characters, making judgments and acting on instincts, that allow students to expand their view into the wider world and it becomes part of their collection of experiences. Rosenblatt also acknowledged the often dichotomous relationship in literature study between literary elements or form and response, and emphasized the contributions of both to the total reading experience. She wrote,

Similarly it is essential to hold firmly to the totality of the reader’s experience of the literary work whenever we are tempted to speak as though the structure of the play or novel were distinct from the specific sensations, emotions, personalities, and events presented in the work. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 46)

In the current climate of standards and accountability, a more skills-based approach emphasizing the elements of literature, asking students to explain, analyze, or identify the rising action or the climax of the plot, or relate the theme of the story are emphasized by the content standards and the achievement tests (Ohio Department of Education, 2001). However, Rosenblatt (1995) pointed out the need for the aesthetic in this otherwise efferent approach to literary elements by saying

Similarly, although we may speak of the structure of the play and even make diagrams that purport to represent the rising tension and the climax, we must remember that the rising tension results from the reader’s identification with
certain personalities presented to him and from his vicarious experience of
emotions and ideas. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 46)

In other words, as Many (1994) indicated in her study of stance, it is nearly impossible to
separate the aesthetic from the efferent and as Rosenblatt stated, there are those literary
elements that cannot be defined in the efferent without the aesthetic connection.
Heathington (1994) examined the current focus of the accountability system on skills
leading to teachers concentrating on skills over aesthetic or affective responses. She
wrote

Teachers’ realize their accountability is usually based on the skill development of
their students and, in some schools, teachers’ success is based on this
achievement, rather than on any measure of the students’ love of reading and
writing. It is not surprising that teachers do not concentrate on students’ attitude
toward literacy activities, but instead give their first attention to the skill needs of
their students. (p. 201)

Heathington continued her line of inquiry by examining how teachers’ working in a
skills-based environment feel the need to structure all of the students’ activities toward
that end, thus eliminating student choices. She described not only the affective response,
but the ability to make choices about reading material as important to a student’s overall
literacy growth, saying

If teachers do not allow students to make these decisions as they progress through
school, students will not have the ability once they graduate. Self-selection of
materials and of times to read must become part of student’s literacy activities from their first day of school. (Heathington, 1994, p. 203)

Squire (1994) brought together the ideas of Rosenblatt, Many, and Heathington when he wrote, “If we use literature only to teach reading skills or strategies, we will prevent children from understanding the experience of reading” (p. 645).

Summary

This section outlined several issues related to the construction of the reading curriculum as it is being examined in this study. We know that students are reporting a disconnect between what they would choose to read given the opportunity and what they are being asked to read in school. We know that if students have choices they tend to be more engaged readers and that can lead to improved reading achievement. We know that teachers in the state of Ohio have an official curriculum that comes with accountability measures in the form of achievement testing in the middle grades. What we do not know is how teachers are creating the operational curriculum and making their own choices about reading material and activities. We know that curriculum mapping and teaming might be involved in that process, and based on NAEP data we know that at least some of that involves using both textbook anthologies and adolescent literature. We also do not know what teachers are asking their students to do with the reading material in class, when and where they are employing efferent or aesthetic stances. We do not know how these decisions are influenced by the factors reviewed in this chapter such as the official curriculum, curriculum mapping, teaming, or student choice. We need to know how teachers are creating the day-to-day operational reading curriculum in order to provide
professional development, instruct new teachers, and help schools to improve on accountability measures, and increase student engagement with reading.

There is a need for an interpretive theory that begins to describe how the operational reading curriculum is happening in light of issues within the official curriculum and the accountability system in the state of Ohio. By using a constant-comparative methodology and interviewing teachers in a variety of schools, this research has resulted in an interpretive theory of teachers’ decision-making process as it impacts reading curriculum, specifically literary reading. The next section explains the methods of data collection and analysis in this study.
CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making process of eighth grade reading/language arts teachers in an area of Northeast Ohio in order to determine how they are choosing reading materials and activities and when they are giving students choices over reading materials and activities. These decisions are being considered in light of the current educational climate of a standards-based curriculum, including the Ohio achievement tests, and the accountability measures outlined in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Data in this study were gathered through a series of questionnaires and interviews with practicing teachers during the 2006-2007 school year. This chapter provides an explanation of the methodology used in this study and the data analysis procedures used.

Justification of Method

The questions in this study have been examined using a qualitative research methodology known as grounded theory. Charmaz (2005) defined grounded theory as a constant comparative method of study that answers questions such as “What is happening here?” Grounded theory is particularly suited to studies of curriculum according to Charmaz (2005) and LeCompte and Preissle (2001) because of key questions such as “what” and “how.” The goal of grounded theory is to come away with an interpretive
theory that helps to explain the phenomena in question. For this study the phenomenon is the process of teacher decision making regarding reading curriculum in light of NCLB goals and Ohio achievement tests. Grounded theory is not an attempt at generating grand theories, to find the ultimate and only explanation, but to be able to reach a conclusion that others could investigate further to support or refute. Conrad (2001) defined this method as “theory generated form [sic] data systematically obtained through the constant comparative method . . . a multifaceted approach to research designed to maximize flexibility and aid the creative generation of theory” (p. 256). Charmaz (2006) emphasized the nature of understanding a phenomenon rather than explaining it, looking for patterns and connections to support interpretations.

Key questions in grounded theory include “What do people assume is real? How do they construct and act on their view of reality?” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 127). The purpose of this study is to create theoretical explanations for teacher decision making and student choice, which can be understood and applied by practitioners and teacher-educators, by looking for patterns and connections between teachers’ responses in the same schools and among different school districts all operating with the same basic set of academic content standards. Grounded theory methodology allows for that theory to be interpreted from the data as the researcher attempts to answer not only the research questions but also questions about what is happening in each situation. Mann (1993) addressed this issue when she said that one goal of grounded theory is that it turns the experiences of one setting into a model for others, that it should “reflect the context in which it was developed, be understandable to the people within that context, be general enough to
apply to a range of situations in the context, and improve the users’ control over those situations” (p. 134). In this study the following research questions were used to guide the investigation and create a context for others to identify and apply to their own situations as they interpret the findings. This methodology works well for the questions in this study as the researcher collects and analyzes data to answer the question “What is happening here?” in each school setting.

In order to generate the interpretive theory this study seeks, the following research questions guided data collection:

1. What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading materials and activities?
2. How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making in the district?
3. What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading/ language arts?
4. What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to do with that reading material?
5. When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities?
6. How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers’ decisions changed over time?
Plan of the Study

Setting

Due to time constraints and travel expenses, the researcher confined this study to schools in two counties in Northeast Ohio that were within a reasonable driving distance and still met the criteria for the study. The initial sampling began with six schools that were paired for comparison purposes using similar demographic factors such as student population and socio-economic status, but different school report card ratings. The purpose of the school pairings was two-fold. Hoover (2000) cited socio-economic status as a factor in success or failure on the Ohio Proficiency Test. By investigating schools that had similar demographic information and contextual factors, the socio-economic conditions of the school would not be highlighted as extenuating circumstances. Choosing schools with different report card ratings between Continuous Improvement and Effective allowed for comparisons and contrasts to be examined based on reading achievement in the schools as reported on the report card. Conclusions in a qualitative study are not absolute or definitive, but the variation in report card rating allows that rating to become an item of analysis in conjunction with other factors. Table 3 illustrates each pair of schools: one school in each pair was rated Continuous Improvement and one was rated Effective in the 2005-2006 school year report card.

Participants and Initial Sampling

For this study, sampling consisted of all eighth grade language arts/reading teachers in each of the schools selected. Building principals were contacted by phone and asked permission for the teachers to participate in the research project. At that time,
Table 3

*Comparison of Schools in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average Daily Membership (ADM)</th>
<th>Poverty as % of ADM</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>% Agricultural Property</th>
<th>% Minority Students</th>
<th>Local Report Card Status 05-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>2,101</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>33,901</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>EFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>3,241</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>27,307</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>2,574</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>32,907</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>32,007</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>EFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>5,972</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>38,523</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td>5,191</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>31,275</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>EFF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research project was described, and the principals identified the appropriate teachers for the study and helped to facilitate the interview schedule. In some schools reading and language arts were taught as separate classes. If the language arts teachers were not involved with the selection and teaching of literature and reading applications, those teachers were not interviewed.

After building principals granted permission, teachers were contacted by phone calls and emails and interviews were scheduled. In two cases, School B and School E, the principals described the teachers’ planning process as team planning and arranged interviews with the entire eighth grade staff at once. All eighth grade reading/language
arts teachers in each district were interviewed with one exception. One teacher in School E was not able to meet at the time the rest of the team was interviewed.

One week before the interview a questionnaire was sent to teachers as an email attachment, along with a request that the questionnaire be completed and returned to the researcher prior to the interview (see Appendix A for a copy of the pre-interview questionnaire). In 16 cases teachers did not return the questionnaire in advance, but gave it to the researcher on the day of the interview. This prevented the researcher from reviewing the responses in advance of the interview to better plan follow-up questions based on the questionnaire. The result was that the researcher was forced to quickly scan each questionnaire prior to the interview and adjust questions as the interview progressed.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection in grounded theory is a somewhat cyclical process, but there must be a starting point that helps to provide some direction. The research questions provided a starting point to guide the creation of the pre-interview questionnaire and the conversations during the interviews. These questions were developed based on the researcher’s predictions of what factors might influence a classroom teacher’s decision making process. As both a former classroom teacher and a teacher educator who works with pre-service teachers in the field, the researcher had background experiences to be able to make such predictions. In addition, because all of the teachers in this study were working in middle schools, there were possible factors inherent to middle school philosophy and organization, such as interdisciplinary teams, that could affect the structure of decision making in the school. Therefore, the list of research questions was
created as the researcher brainstormed what factors could possibly be influencing teacher decision making with respect to the reading/language arts curriculum. Table 4 lists the research questions and data collection procedures.

Data were collected from multiple sources. Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire in advance of the interview listing the titles of reading materials they planned to use in the 2006-2007 school year and to provide a general outline of the kinds of activities that students would be asked to complete during the reading and studying of the various works. It was made clear that the researcher sought a simple list of strategies, not detailed lesson plans, so as not to over burden teachers with too much preparation for the interviews. Teachers were also asked for demographic information that included:

1. number of years of teaching experience
2. number of years teaching grade 8 language arts/reading
3. certification/licensure area (K-8, 4-9, or 7-12)
4. advanced degrees or National Board certification
5. school factors such as the presence of a curriculum director or a team planning environment.

The constant comparative methodology in this study is not testing of a hypothesis, but a discovery of information as it is analyzed through various levels of coding. It was impossible to predict all of the information that would eventually be the important factors in the teachers’ decision making process and so this demographic information was also collected. The purpose of the questionnaire was to give teachers time to think about their reading curriculum decisions and collect titles into categories in advance and to make the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Data Tools</th>
<th>Details (when, where, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading materials and activities?</td>
<td>Determine from teachers what influence academic content standards has in reading curriculum decisions. Determine from teachers what influence report card ratings have on reading curriculum decisions</td>
<td>Questionnaire, Interview, School Report Card</td>
<td>Comparisons to 8th grade Ohio Academic Content Standards, Comparisons to School Report Card results for 2005-06, Comparison to NAEP data for Ohio in appropriate categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making in the district?</td>
<td>Determine how curriculum decisions are made, individual teacher, teams, curriculum directors, etc.</td>
<td>Questionnaire, Interview, District level Curriculum Guides or materials</td>
<td>Individual interviews with teacher or other curriculum decision makers at school sites, Analysis of lesson plans or other district level curriculum guides when appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to read?</td>
<td>Determine what teachers are asking students to read and to do with that reading material in class.</td>
<td>Questionnaire, Interview, District level Curriculum Guides or materials, Lesson Plans</td>
<td>Phone calls, email, and questionnaires, Individual interviews with teacher or other curriculum decision makers at school sites, Analysis of lesson plans or other district level curriculum guides when appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to do with that reading material?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities?</td>
<td>Determine the extent of student choice in the reading curriculum</td>
<td>Questionnaire, Interview</td>
<td>Phone calls, email, and questionnaires, Individual interviews with teacher or other curriculum decision makers at school sites, Analysis of lesson plans or other district level curriculum guides when appropriate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
best use of the time during the interview to talk about their choices and the reasons for them, rather than spend that time listing materials.

According to Rubin and Rubin (1995) interviews followed a “tree and branch” model. A tree and branch model of qualitative interviews has a main topic as the central point or the trunk of the tree, and the branches are the main questions. The trunk of this interview process was the main topic of the decision making process for eighth grade reading curriculums in area schools. The branches represented the research questions which were covered on the initial questionnaire and fleshed out in conversation during the interview process. Rubin and Rubin stated, “The researcher might use the tree and branch model if he or she knows, perhaps from previous interviews, observation, or background reading, that certain main questions must be asked in order to cover the entire subject” (p. 159). In this case to be able to compare each school and the teachers within, the interview questions needed to cover the same material, even though the organization of the interview was different with the flow of each conversation. The goal, according to Rubin and Rubin, is “to learn about the individual branches that frame the entire tree but still obtain depth and detail” (p. 159). It would have been possible to learn about the branches of the tree solely from the questionnaires, but the additional elements gained from the interviews would have been lost. For example, the questionnaires would have provided a tally of the number of schools and teachers using Paul Zindel’s novel *The Pigman* (1968), but would not have provided the details that teachers used in describing their individual reasons for choosing this specific title.
During the interviews the researcher took field notes as well as audio taping all interviews for later transcription. Whenever possible, teachers were asked to share copies of book lists, syllabi, or other materials as illustrations of topics discussed in the interviews. These were kept by the researcher as references to verify titles during data preparation. Teacher 14 invited the researcher for a follow-up visit to her classroom to see the Read 180 program at work. This program is described in more detail in chapter 4. Other data specific to each school were collected from public sources of information including the state report card ratings, eighth grade reading achievement test data, and statewide NAEP data for comparison.

Occasional follow-up was necessary to gain a more complete data set, especially with teachers from earlier interviews, as new codes began to emerge from data analysis. For example, as the data began to show that many teachers were using Holocaust literature, some teachers from early in the study were contacted again via email and asked to explain their rationale for using that time period in history as a subject of study. Another category that emerged from the data was the similarity in textbook publishers being used. Teachers who had not specified a textbook were emailed for clarification and the pre-interview questionnaire was modified to include a question asking for the textbook information for all subsequent participants.

Interviews were conducted one school at a time over an eight-week period between December 2006 and January 2007. The focus of the interviews was a follow-up to the questionnaires. The researcher asked teachers to elaborate on the list of titles, to tell how and why those titles were chosen, and to share about other stakeholders in the school
that participate in curriculum decisions (departments, teams, central office curriculum staff, etc.). These interviews were conducted on a schedule of one to two per week lasting 30-45 minutes and were transcribed and analyzed as soon as data existed.

Data Analysis

As interviews were transcribed, data were coded using methods of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory methodology suggests that data collection proceed through a process known as theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling requires that the researcher, through the process of open coding of initial data, determines categories of information that need more information or additional sampling to test theories or look for negative cases. In the case of this study, interview questions and the questionnaire were modified during data analysis. For example, the original pre-interview questionnaire did not ask for a textbook title. As more teachers in the study were listing a textbook as a resource, that item was added to the questionnaire. As more teachers talked about teaching a Holocaust novel, a question was added to the interview to be sure each teacher was asked about teaching a Holocaust novel and why that was their choice.

The process of data collection continued through open coding with the use of in vivo codes to establish categories in the stage of axial coding to create subcategories, and look for elaboration and find negative cases (Charmaz, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All coding was done manually in this study. As each interview was transcribed, the researcher created notes and memos tracking the use of similar language, terms, and titles to begin the coding process. For example, curriculum mapping was not part of the initial questionnaire. It became an in vivo code after teachers in School C
discussed the curriculum map as essential to their decision making process. Following that interview, curriculum mapping became part of the interview questions for all of the subsequent schools. Other codes were drawn from the research questions.

One research question focused on where students had choices in either the reading materials or activities. In each interview teachers were asked when and where students had choices and then “student choice” became a code. Often teachers talked about places students had choices at various times throughout the interview, not only immediately following the researcher’s question, and so the full transcript was examined line by line for responses regarding student choice. In another case, the teachers were asked on the questionnaire to list the reading materials used for the 2006-2007 school year in columns labeled for novels, short stories, poems, essays, and other. Novels and short stories each became codes in the open coding process. During the stage of axial coding, the more specific category of Holocaust literature as a subcategory under novels and the use of Edgar Allan Poe’s work became a subcategory under short stories.

The constant comparative analysis yielded such subcategories as Holocaust literature and Edgar Allan Poe. During open coding the broader topics of novels and short stories were created, but as data analysis progressed and additional data was gathered during each additional interview, it became apparent that there were more specific themes within those categories. This led the researcher to go back to previous interviews to look for support for these subcategories and additional data. Both the pre-interview questionnaires and the interview transcripts were reviewed each time a new category or subcategory emerged from the data as some teachers listed things on the questionnaires
that were not discussed in the interviews and vice versa. Data from early interviews from one district were compared with later interviews from other districts and data from teachers within the same buildings were compared.

Throughout this process the researcher also used tools such as memo writing and tables of information to further track the coding process. Writing memos or drawing tables as they are being created from the data allowed the researcher to track her thought process when defining categories so that two other important processes could take place.

In addition to transcripts and memos, the researcher also created tables to track areas where teachers gave students choices in the curriculum, the frequency of use of various activities that were named both in the interviews and questionnaires, the frequency of curriculum maps in school districts, and the frequency of district-wide book lists used by schools in the study. Excel was used to keep track of all titles of novels and short stories named by teachers in both the interviews and the questionnaires and to track frequency of use by title and by school district.

The coding process is also supported by inter-rater reliability. Writing memos or creating tables allowed the researcher to explain her thought processes to a colleague who examined a sampling of the data focusing on two major categories, influences on curriculum decisions and student choices, representing more than 20% of the data, to determine the validity and reliability of the researcher’s conclusions. The colleague supported the researcher’s coding process and conclusions from the data with nearly 100% agreement.
Member-checking was not used in this study for two main reasons. First, during the interviews the researcher attempted to clarify as many responses as possible, often rephrasing teachers’ responses and asking if they were being interpreted accurately by the researcher. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed so there was no question of specific wording in direct quotations since they were all on tape. Secondly, the teachers in this study were very gracious with their time, especially considering the time of year. This study was conducted near the end of the first semester and sometimes scheduling of interviews was difficult based on teacher work loads. Several teachers expressed a level of frustration with the length of the questionnaire and the preparation before the interview. Since most interview transcripts averaged nine single-spaced pages and other than details such as textbook titles there were no issues of interpretation that needed to be clarified, it seemed unreasonable to ask teachers to read the transcripts and complete member-checking.

This data analysis and coding process continued until the researcher reached the point of theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) when there were no new, significant categories, themes, or issues coming from the data analysis. At this point data analysis stopped, and the researcher wrote the research findings included in the next section.

Summary

The constant comparative grounded theory methodology requires data collection and analysis to take place simultaneously and recursively. It is only after the data collection process is complete that patterns can be established, themes are discovered,
and insights are gained. The intense review of data reveals similarities and differences between teachers and schools and their approaches to reading curriculum decisions.

The next chapter presents the results of this investigation. Using the research questions as an organizing framework, the results are presented as they address the various issues related the initial questions, categories, and sub-categories.
CHAPTER IV
DATA ANALYSIS

This qualitative study investigated how eighth grade teachers made several decisions regarding the operational reading curriculum in their schools. The purpose of this study was to determine what eighth grade teachers were asking students to read, why they were making those choices, what was influencing those choices, and where students were able to make choices. This study focused on the responses of eighth grade reading/language arts teachers through questionnaires and interviews in order to examine the reading curriculum in each classroom. Nineteen teachers in six school districts and seven school buildings completed questionnaires and were interviewed for this study over a period of eight weeks. The study was conducted through a grounded theory approach, meaning that data analysis proceeded through recursive stages of data gathering, open coding, memo writing, and analysis until theoretical saturation was achieved.

This chapter is organized based on the research questions that outlined this study. They are:

1. What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading materials and activities?
2. How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making in the district?
3. What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading/language arts?

4. What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to do with that reading material?

5. When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities?

6. How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers’ decisions changed over time?

The following is a presentation of the data guided by the research questions and the subcategories that were identified during data analysis.

Research Questions 1 and 2

What factors do eighth grade teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading material and activities? How are eighth grade teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision-making in the district?

This section answers the research questions by describing each pair of schools, the specific characteristics of each, and the factors that the teachers cited as playing a role in their decision making processes regarding the reading curriculum for eighth graders in their respective schools. Later sections describe specifically how teachers are making curriculum decisions about reading material and activities. Because of the variation in each location, this section is organized by the design of this study which included pairings of schools based on demographic information and district-level Ohio School
Report Card ratings. In a study of the Ohio Proficiency Test, Hoover (2000) found that socio-economic status was influential to a school’s performance; therefore, in this study schools were paired to achieve a reasonable comparison and lessen the influence of socio-economic status. Districts were paired based on location, those within the same county and in similar economic areas. Schools were also paired by the size of the student population. The difference in each pair was the district report card ratings. In each pair one district was rated *Effective* and one was rated *Continuous Improvement*.

After reviewing and coding all of the data, the categories of the influences on reading curriculum decision making were varied and inextricably tied. Each factor of influence was dependent upon the school district in which it was situated. Schools could not be compared to one another on an equal plane because the characteristics were unique to each site and interdependent within each school. The configuration of the school and contextual factors such as whether teachers planned in teams; whether there was a district or county level curriculum guide or map; if students, especially the gifted population, were tracked; or if language arts was divided into different classes each related differently depending on the schools’ circumstances. The teachers’ processes when determining the reading curriculum were shaped, in part, by the characteristics of the school. In addition, every teacher was aware of the statewide academic content standards, and every teacher cited those standards and the results of achievement testing as major influences on reading curriculum. Therefore this discussion begins with the influences on teachers’ decision making. To preserve anonymity, schools are coded with letters and teachers have been assigned numbers.
Schools A and B

School A and School B were located in the same county and had similar characteristics, as seen in Table 5. Average daily membership differed by a wide margin, but median household incomes in these two districts were much closer.

Table 5

District Comparison Data for Schools A and B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average Daily Membership (ADM)</th>
<th>Poverty as % of ADM</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>% Agricultural Property</th>
<th>% Minority Students</th>
<th>Local Report Card Status 05-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>2,101</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>33,901</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>EFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>3,241</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>27,307</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>CI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three teachers in School A were interviewed in this study. All taught eighth grade language arts. The teachers in School A were all experienced teachers as evidenced by the demographic information collected for this study, which is summarized in Table 6. School A did not divide language arts into separate classes for reading and writing. All three teachers taught all aspects of language arts as represented in the Ohio Academic Content Standards. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 taught in inclusion model classrooms with heterogeneous populations; Teacher 3 worked with a gifted track of students. The school is organized in grade-level teams, but very little of that teaming structure influenced the language arts teachers’ curriculum choices or decisions. Teacher 1 described the school structure by saying,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching 8th grade</th>
<th>Language Arts/Reading</th>
<th>Certification/Licensure</th>
<th>Advanced Degrees Or National Board Certification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>English 7-12</td>
<td>French 7-12</td>
<td>M.Ed. Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading 1-12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Masters – Reading 30 hours gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>English 7-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The way it works in our building is there’s the eighth grade team and there’s the seventh grade team and then there’s the RATS team, the related arts. I can tell you how we do it on the eighth grade team—there are two teachers for each subject area, so we each have a teaching partner. There’s an intervention specialist and she does inclusion classes for everything.

The two teachers in the inclusion model classrooms meet with the grade level team, but neither said that the team had any influence over what they do individually in their classrooms.

Teachers 1 and 2 do talk weekly about what they are doing in language arts and help to support one another, but do not plan or coordinate lessons, units, or activities that would make a common experience for any eighth grade student in the school regardless of the teacher. Both teach *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) as a whole-class novel and have
shared ideas or materials, but do not coordinate that novel study to be at the same time of year or use all of the same activities. Teacher 3 teaches both seventh and eighth grade gifted track language arts, so her schedule prevents her from being part of any grade level team. Teacher 3 meets with one of the high school English teachers to coordinate expectations for her students,

I meet and discuss . . . books she would like to have the kids have read . . . before they come up. Like *Mockingbird*, my kids do here and then they don’t do that up there. The other kids will do it, but my kids will go on and do something higher level then, something that’s advanced placement or whatever they need.

She cited only one title in common with her colleagues, *The Grizzly* (Johnson, Johnson, & Riswold, 1988), but did not name it as a title that she uses consistently every year.

All three teachers use a common lesson plan format that requires alignment to the Ohio Academic Content Standards. When asked how the standards influenced their planning, all three talked about having the standards close at hand when writing lesson plans, of thinking about them all the time, and constantly checking to make sure that they were covering the standards and making adjustments as needed to insure that coverage. These teachers described this as a fairly solitary and autonomous process, not influenced by the grade level team, the inclusion specialist, the curriculum director, or each other as language arts teachers.

Although this school individually and the district as a whole are both rated *Effective* by the state and scored above the state average in eighth grade reading achievement, the school has not met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). When asked if the
school’s performance on the Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) influenced their decision making, the two heterogeneous classroom teachers both agreed that the test was always part of their thinking when planning. Teacher 1 responded, “Oh all the time, all the time. We scored low last time on short and extended responses and so we have been doing formula writing,” which she described as a means to help students improve when writing short answer and extended response items on the test. Teacher 2 described a “big push” from the administration to raise scores, especially with some of the identified sub-groups that are keeping the district from meeting AYP. It has been up to the teachers to find ways to reach these students without guidance or strategies from the curriculum director. Teacher 2 was using this school year to investigate a textbook series, something that none of these teachers were currently using, to provide more support materials to help improve test scores. She was also interested in learning to use literature circles, but again lacked professional development support from the curriculum director.

Teacher 3, the gifted teacher, was the only one in this school who did not express a feeling of frustration or urgency with respect to test scores. Teacher 3 is aware of the test and tries to align the structure of her questions and the test language with what she does in her classroom, but did not express the same feeling as her colleagues that her students were not performing well or that she needed to change what she was doing in order to raise student performance. She said,

I don’t think about it now the way that I did when I taught sixth grade and when it was [the] sixth grade proficiency test. In the beginning when we were so stressed
and we ended up stressing the kids. I try to use the terminology. I try to write my questions in the same manner.

The teachers in School B were interviewed on a waiver day when classes were not in session, but teachers reported for a work day. All three eighth grade language arts teachers were interviewed at once because according to the principal they planned together and taught most of the same curriculum together. This turned out to be the case when talking to the teachers, again with the exception of the teacher teaching the gifted track. Teacher 4 was the gifted track teacher in this building, but also taught heterogeneous sections and used most works in common with the other teachers with those sections. The characteristics of teachers in School B were only slightly more varied than School A, as evidenced by Table 7. Teacher 5 is the only teacher in this study to hold National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.

Table 7

Demographic Information for Teachers in School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching 8th grade Language Arts/Reading</th>
<th>Certification/Licensure</th>
<th>Advanced Degrees Or National Board Certification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>English/Drama/Theatre 7-12</td>
<td>MA Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8, Reading K-12, LD/BD K-12</td>
<td>Masters, NBCT EA/ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The structure of decision making in this school did not afford teachers team planning time as did School A, but these teachers created their own language arts planning time. Teacher 4 described meeting at “my house in the summer, Susan’s Coffee and Tea during the school year, we meet on our own time.” They used many novels in common including *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), *The Acorn People* (Jones, 1976), *Downsiders* (Shusterman, 2001), and *Dogsong* (Paulsen, 1985). Teacher 5 stated that the two driving forces in their curriculum are the state standards first and the achievement tests second. Teachers in this building were required to have the standards posted in their classrooms. Teacher 4 cited the OAT as accounting for 90% of her consideration when choosing activities and materials.

The year previous to this study, the teachers met monthly to examine test scores and the implications for curriculum. One area that was found to be deficient was nonfiction. As a result, one set of 30 copies of *Fever 1793* (Anderson, 2000) was purchased as a piece of historical fiction to support the social studies standards; however, because there is only one set of books and three teachers who need to share them, this study of historical fiction does not coincide with the study of related material in the social studies classes and has to rotate among the language arts classes as each teacher takes a turn with the books. As Teacher 4 explained:

But we don’t work cooperatively with the social studies teachers because there are only 30 books. So even though the social studies teachers handle that material in maybe November, some of us won’t get the books until June. So it’s not an interdisciplinary unit.
This district’s overall rating is *Continuous Improvement*, but this building is rated at the higher *Effective* rating with eighth grade reading achievement scores above the state average and above those of School A, but School B has not met AYP either. The feeling from these teachers was that they carry a burden to raise test scores. All three teachers expressed that sentiment equally. Teacher 4 described it like this:

> Our curriculum director, we have one K-12, and she has made it clear through her meetings that (Teacher 5) was discussing that the material is not important, what’s important are the standards and indicators and benchmarks . . . it doesn’t matter how we get there but the emphasis is on getting there . . . since many of us keep our students more than one year and we also know that at the end of the year our reports are . . . broken out under teachers’ names, so this is how well *you* did and this is how well *you* did, not really how well the students did.

These teachers also talked about changes to their curriculum reflecting the need to raise test scores by incorporating more terminology that aligns to the test, especially with elements of literature, and that lesson plans have to be coordinated to the standards.

The teachers in this first pair of schools were all influenced by the content standards and the results of the achievement tests for their respective districts. Individual building ratings did not seem to matter. In both districts teachers were being sent a message from the principals and the curriculum directors that improvement of test scores and passing AYP were a top priority and they were being held responsible for finding ways to achieve those results. Teachers in these schools did not cite other school personnel or stakeholders as having any influence on their choices of reading material or
activities. Neither school uses a district-wide curriculum map. School B does have a book list but that list was not made available as part of this study. Neither school divides the language arts into multiple classes.

*Schools C and D*

Schools A and B represented a category of schools that fall between rural and suburban made up of smaller municipalities with a single city or city and adjacent township comprising the district. Schools C and D represented a different category. Both of these districts are more rural in nature. Neither district encompasses a single municipality, but is made up of multiple townships and villages creating consolidated school districts that 50 or more years ago were served by individual township schools. Again, the demographics between these two schools are similar. Table 8 illustrates the population differences between Schools C and D but the similarity between the two districts in agricultural property. The amount of agricultural property is very different in Schools C and D from Schools A and B, emphasizing the different characteristics of these pairings.

Two teachers were interviewed in each school district. School C has four eighth grade language arts teachers, but they divide the subject matter between literature study and grammar and writing. The principal of School C suggested that to meet the needs of this study it would only be necessary to meet with the literature teachers, and this was supported by these teachers during the interviews. In School D there were only two eighth grade teachers who taught all of the language arts and both were interviewed. The teachers in School C varied considerably in their teaching experience with Teacher 8
Table 8

*District Comparison Data for Schools C and D*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average Daily Membership (ADM)</th>
<th>Poverty as % of ADM</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>% Agricultural Property</th>
<th>% Minority Students</th>
<th>Local Report Card Status 05-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>2,574</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>32,907</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>32,007</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>EFF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

having more than twice the years of experience as Teacher 7 (see Table 9).

Faculty at School C has worked for three years to create a curriculum map that Teacher 7 described as “a living document, like the Constitution, ever evolving to fit the needs of my kids in my class.” The map arranges the Ohio Academic Content Standards benchmarks and indicators for the teachers by marking period and creates an assessment plan that helps to track student progress towards the benchmarks and indicators for each nine-week period.

Table 9

*Demographic Information for Teachers in School C*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching 8\textsuperscript{th} grade Language Arts/Reading</th>
<th>Certification/Licensure</th>
<th>Advanced Degrees Or National Board Certification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8</td>
<td>Masters – Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>English 7-12</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher 7 cited the standards as the driving force for lesson planning. In addition, teachers are provided with an intervention plan for students who were deficient in particular areas of the test and then the teachers create differentiated assignments to help support more individualized student needs. Teacher 7 believes that if he is following that intervention plan, then he can document his efforts to help students achieve by saying,

*If they’re weak on something we want to try to fill in those needs so we got the intervention plan. We follow it pretty much to a ‘t’ documenting things that we’ve done to prove that we’ve been doing that.*

Similar to School A, the major difference between Teacher 7 and Teacher 8 in School C was that Teacher 7’s schedule included the gifted track and Teacher 8’s did not. This difference reflected in their views of the standards and the testing. Teacher 8 also cited the standards and the curriculum map as being foundational to her planning, but the tone was very different when talking about the test. Teacher 8 talked about the need to meet the standards as limiting what she could do in the classroom, forcing her lessons to be more focused on literary elements, for example, and less on “the fun stuff, I don’t do as much of, I’m very focused on ‘okay we’ve got setting, now we’ve got to move on.’” Teacher 8 also discussed the intervention plans within the district for students who were not performing well on the Ohio Achievement Test and the pressure that creates on her as a teacher: “We’re so pushed right now, I mean everybody, we have to intervene, we have to keep track of our interventions.” Team planning played a small role in the decisions of these teachers and how they approach the standards and the intervention, primarily the coordination with the other language arts teachers whose focus is on grammar, writing,
and vocabulary acquisition. No other stakeholders, that is, curriculum directors or inclusion specialists, were discussed as having any influence for these teachers. These two teachers did use three novels in common: *Night* (Wiesel, 1972), *The Wave* (Strasser, 1981), and *Devil’s Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1988) for a round of literature circles.

The district rating for School C is *Continuous Improvement*, but this particular building rating was *Effective* which included exceeding the state averages in eighth grade reading. Again, this is a school that has not met AYP on a building or district level, hence the emphasis on intervention with sub-groups.

School D has two language arts teachers who are responsible for all areas of instruction including literature, writing, and grammar study. These teachers varied in their years of experience and advanced degrees, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10

*Demographic Information for Teachers in School D*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching 8th grade Language Arts/Reading</th>
<th>Certification/Licensure</th>
<th>Advanced Degrees Or National Board Certification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>English 7-12, Elem. K-6</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8</td>
<td>Masters – Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School D is arranged on a block schedule, and Teacher 10 talked about the difficulty he had a few years prior to the study adjusting to the difference between splitting out the language arts and the change to combining them: “I had a tough time
becoming a block, it took some adjusting.” Both Teacher 9 and Teacher 10 used the word “checklist” to describe the standards framework they use for planning. Teacher 9 described this as a “county curriculum, basically a checklist” based on the state standards, and Teacher 10 added that it was a “contractual obligation” to teach the standards on the checklist. This was the only mention from any teacher of the standards being related to the collective bargaining agreement. Many teachers, including Teacher 10 but not Teacher 9, used the word “drives” to describe the relationship between the standards and their individual lesson planning. Referring to the checklist Teacher 10 said:

There are a lot of things in here that . . . lead you in a direction and lead us rather, in a direction to accomplish the benchmarks and the . . . grade level indicators, but this, really more than anything I believe, drives what we do.

Neither teacher in School D expressed a level of urgency, frustration, or need to succeed on the Ohio Achievement Test as did peers in Schools A, B, and C. Teacher 9 described the influence of the test on his planning as minimal, believing that too much emphasis is placed on this single measure and that “there’s a lot more to learning than what those test scores can show.” Teacher 10 said that he uses the test as “a motivator to get them on task a lot.” He also placed some responsibility for covering the standards on the shoulders of the textbook publishers, saying that the literature book did a “pretty good job” of covering the needed material so that students have the opportunity to be prepared. These teachers do not engage in team planning with each other or other stakeholders such as intervention specialists or a curriculum director with the exception of one language arts class through the day that runs on a different schedule and both language arts teachers see
the same group of students for a shorter period of time. They do coordinate their planning for this single class.

Although the district level rating for School D is at the *Effective* level, this individual building is rated *Excellent*, the highest of the scale. The district as a whole has not met AYP, but the building had.

Schools C and D approach curriculum planning in very different ways. School C had a district-wide curriculum map that guided lesson planning for all of the teachers, but that document was not shared as part of this research. School D had adopted a county-level iteration of the standards, taking no ownership at the building or district level for the content or arrangement of the curriculum, yet describing it as a contractual obligation. The researcher was shown a copy of that list during one interview, but teachers did not share an additional copy. School D has a district-wide book list, but not School C. The book list for School D (see Appendix B) lists the novels that are in the school library as classroom collections for eighth grade and the number of copies available for each. Teachers’ names were listed next to each title, but removed to preserve anonymity.

School C divides the language arts. School D has moved away from that model. School C had the lower overall district report card rating and a system in place to identify students in struggling sub-groups and create intervention plans for them with the goal of raising test scores. Neither teacher in School D seemed overly concerned with the test scores and were teaching in a building with the highest state rating. Teachers in School D did not cite other school personnel or stakeholders as having a large influence on their choices of reading material or activities. In School C, with the exception of the language arts
teachers because this school divided reading and language arts into separate classes, the
teachers did not cite any other stakeholders as part of their curriculum decision making.

_Schools E and F_

The final pair of schools in this study was the most suburban of the districts
included and was in a different county than the other four schools. School E and School F
have very similar characteristics in many respects including student population and
median household income as shown in Table 11.

Table 11

_district Comparison Data for Schools E and F_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average Daily Membership (ADM)</th>
<th>Poverty as % of ADM</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>% Agricultural Property</th>
<th>% Minority Students</th>
<th>Local report Card Status 05-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>5,972</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>38,523</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td>5,191</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>31,275</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>EFF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though School E’s student population is larger, all of their eighth graders are
housed in one middle school building with six teachers each covering all areas of
language arts. School F has two middle school buildings with two reading teachers each;
reading and language arts are separated. Both reading teachers in each building were
interviewed for this study (see Table 12).

The teachers in School E were interviewed as a group during their common
planning time as the principal characterized their planning as team planning. These
### Table 12

**Demographic Information for Teachers in School E**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching 8th grade Language Arts/Reading</th>
<th>Certification/ Licensure</th>
<th>Advanced Degrees Or National Board Certification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11 English/Speech 7-12 Gifted K-12 Technology K-12</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2 Comprehensive Communications 7-12</td>
<td>Masters – Sports Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7 Elem. 1-8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3 Elem. 1-8, Reading K-12</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8 LA/Reading 4-9</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers had the widest range in teaching experience and advanced degrees in the entire study.

They described the eighth grade as a team of teachers who planned together and taught the same novels such as *October Sky* (Hickam, 1998), *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000), and *Trouble Don’t Last* (Pearsall, 2002). Students in the classrooms of Teachers 12, 13, 15, and one other teacher who was not available to meet for this project but was often referenced by her colleagues, would have a relatively similar experience with the materials and activities in the eighth grade reading curriculum in this school. This was the only school that included content area teachers on an interdisciplinary planning team as having any influence over their reading choices. *October Sky* (Hickam, 1998) is a novel.
taught in conjunction with the science teachers in a unit on astronomy. Teacher 12 described it like this:

As far as *October Sky* the things that we do not only within our own classrooms but even across the curriculum in the science classrooms, . . . they do a lot of the same things so that what eight different, nine different teachers basically working together and a combined unit of astronomy and obviously the book *October Sky*.

*Trouble Don’t Last* (Pearsall, 2002) is a novel about the Underground Railroad that is part of an interdisciplinary unit with social studies. Teacher 11, the gifted teacher, does participate in the study of *October Sky* (Hickam, 1998) and *Trouble Don’t Last* (Pearsall, 2002) but not *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000); her feeling is that the reading level of that book is “a little too easy.” She appreciates her colleagues’ choice of *October Sky* as a challenging book for all of the eighth graders in their building by saying,

I think it’s refreshing. I like to see kids reading books with more than 129 pages, I really do. I think at this age they need to take a large book, tackle it, and find out that it’s interesting and . . . it’s not painful.

One other teacher in the group, Teacher 14, was the only teacher in the entire study to deviate so completely from her colleagues and from any other participant. She used an entirely packaged reading program. Teacher 14 works with the students in the building who have not passed the reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. Teacher 14’s classes are called Reading Academy and she uses *Read 180* published by Scholastic, which employs a combination of computer programs, books, and audio books in an independent tutorial that students work through in 15-minute intervals. Students begin at
a station in small groups of four or five and work through a computer module, listen to an audio book, or read silently and rotate to a different activity around the room every 15 minutes during the class period. Books for silent reading or the audio books are controlled by the publisher. Some are authentic texts such as Daniel’s Story (Matas, 1993) or Miracle’s Boys (Woodson, 2000). Others are controlled vocabulary, leveled readers created by the publisher for this program, such as a graphic novel version of Moby Dick. This was the only program like this in the entire study. The adoption of this program was based on the need to provide additional support to students who were not passing the Ohio Achievement Test in reading. Teacher 14 expressed her desire to expand this program to reach a wider population of struggling readers in the school saying

I think it would be ideal if we could reach just beyond those students who did not pass the OAT or at sixth grade they didn’t pass the proficiency, but now it’s going on the Ohio Achievement Test. But it would be nice if we could reach up the ladder a little bit further and get those kids who have just barely passed it and give them some support too because they don’t qualify for special services. . . . they don’t get tutoring, we don’t have a quote/unquote reading bus here for them to do those kinds of things, so we’re trying to get that in place as well. It seems to be doing some good things for some of the kids, but again, most of the students that I’m working with in that department right now are the students that are on IEPs trying to meet our adequately yearly progress for each of them.
The standards are the basis for lesson planning for these teachers just as all of the other teachers in this study. This school spent time in the summer creating a curriculum map for both seventh and eighth grades that divides the year by quarters or marking periods, but the map was not made available as part of this study. Teacher 14 described the result of this process by saying, “everybody’s targeting them [the standards] about the same timeframe each quarter so that certainly helps to unify what goes on here.” Teachers in School E used the word “unify” several times in the conversation. Unification also led to the conversation about the Ohio Achievement Test.

This was the only school district where the curriculum director was also interviewed. The building principal suggested that the curriculum director be included based on the initial phone contact and description of the study. The conversation with the curriculum director centered around budgets, purchasing, the selection process for a new textbook series, and the paperwork involved for teachers to request a new book be added to the district list.

When the teachers were asked about the role of the curriculum director in their planning, Teacher 13 responded by saying, “Frankly I don’t really feel that she plays that large of a role in determining our curriculum for Language Arts.” Teacher 11 added, “She really doesn’t do too much for English.” The teachers’ consensus was that the curriculum director’s primary role was to keep the district book list up to date and inform teachers if they submitted a proposal to add a work that was already being used elsewhere in the district and to handle the purchasing for school-wide textbook adoptions. When asked for
confirmation that the teachers participating in the study were responsible for making decisions about reading material, Teacher 14 summed up the response:

I think in regards to the trade books, that’s very true. But when we go to adopt a textbook series, we’re trying to get something in house that will support the grammar and English end of things because these kids are coming to us not even being able to identify nouns and verbs and I find that to be very basic, but sometimes the decision is already made at central office which publisher we’re going with . . . We could spend time going through all these materials and saying “This will best suit our needs” and then we get some other adoption entirely, which is very frustrating.

Based on these responses and the experience of interviewing the curriculum director in this district prior to interviewing the teachers, the director’s responses were not coded and analyzed with the other data. The curriculum director’s responses focused mainly on the fiscal condition of the district and how that led to financial decisions related to acquisition of materials. The materials themselves were not her chief concern. She had no preference for the title for a set of novels to be purchased; her concerns dealt with the practicality of the purchase and the fiscal management of the curriculum resources. The curriculum director did provide the researcher with a copy of the district book list (see Appendix F). The book list included all of the books listed by teachers in the interviews and questionnaires and some additional titles that were not included. The book list also gave teachers a range of the number of copies and the storage location so that the books were accessible by any member of the teaching staff.
The district is rated at *Continuous Improvement*, but this building is rated at *Excellent* with eighth grade reading scores more than 10% above the state average, although not meeting AYP. These teachers did not express a feeling of pressure over the achievement test. Several teachers talked about constructing test questions, especially extended response, to align with the OAT format as did most teachers in this study. These teachers also echoed their peers in this study by discussing a renewed emphasis on literary elements such as plot, rising action, and climax. Teacher 11 said it this way, “I’ve noticed the terms, I’ve rearranged the way that I use a lot of the same stories . . . I do that at different parts of the year so that . . . they are all touched on very early in the year.”

Teachers in School F (see Table 13) were very similar to other teachers in this study in many respects. The standards guide their planning and must be reflected on their lesson plans. This district did not have a curriculum map or any other reconfiguration of the standards. Teacher 18 represents the teacher with the longest service in this study. Teacher 16 is the only teacher in the study to have taught eighth grade reading/language arts for her entire career to date.

There are two middle school buildings in this district that represent the demographic information for School F. Like others in this study, these teachers all talked about things like literary elements and model questions as being frequent ways that the testing influences their teaching. Where these teachers were different was in the use of the term “workshop.” Each teacher in this district talked about “doing workshop” two or three days a week. Among the four teachers interviewed, there appeared to be variation in each teacher’s enacting of “workshop.” Teachers 16, 18, and 19 do workshop two days a
Table 13

*Demographic Information for Teachers in School F*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching 8th grade Language Arts/Reading</th>
<th>Certification/Licensure</th>
<th>Advanced Degrees Or National Board Certification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8, Reading K-12</td>
<td>MA in Teaching and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Elem. 1-8, Reading K-12</td>
<td>Ms. Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

week and describe it as time for independent reading and student response. In her classroom, Teacher 16 said “they have their independent reading, what we call workshop. I’m sure you know about that, reading/writing workshop where they read their own independent novels and they respond back.” Responses were collected in journals and teachers guided topics to reflect the literary elements in the content standards as they write back and forth with students. Teacher 17 talked about doing workshop three days a week and also using literary elements as part of the response journal in order to cover the standards.

In eighth grade I have them write to me once a week about different elements of literature so they don’t just write summaries for me they write about setting, plot, conflict, all those kinds of things. . . . this quarter I had them write to me one week and to a peer partner the next week.
She was the only one to describe the workshop model as being central to what she does in the classroom and her classroom displayed the largest collection of adolescent literature by comparison with the other teachers in this district to support that characterization. The others took students to the school library to select books as part of the workshop time. These teachers also varied widely on their thoughts on the Ohio Achievement Test. Teacher 17, who used the workshop model the most, was the least concerned about the reading test. She felt that the workshop model and the coverage of the standards within it prepared the students well for the test saying, “In reading I feel like they know it if I do what I’m supposed to do for in here [in the reading workshop].” Teacher 16 in the same building expressed very different feelings, saying that there was extreme pressure for students to do well.

With our names being put upon that with the fact that I’ve had these children what, five months out of their life? . . . my name is going to go on their test as opposed to the fact that they’ve been in school since they were five years old, which means the same thing. It means that if I do well look how good you did, if I do bad, look how bad you did. By the same token if I do well, I didn’t do it by myself there were eight or nine teachers behind me and if I did bad there were also eight or nine teachers behind me and parents and circumstances, but yea, we’re pressured to do that.

Teachers 18 and 19 spent more time talking about how they, like most teachers in this study, model questions after the structure of the test and work with students on extended responses to make sure they are answering all parts of a question.
Both buildings have an *Effective* rating in a district with the same overall rating, but neither the district nor the individual buildings have met AYP. Both buildings are above the state average in eighth grade reading scores; however, the difference between the two buildings is only three percentage points.

This district had used team planning in both middle school buildings in the past, but eliminated it the year before this study. In addition this district has suffered financial difficulties that forced the closure of a building and the relocation of some teachers, including Teacher 16, who was new to her building during the year of the study. Every teacher expressed disappointment at the loss of teams and all had heard that teams may be reinstated for the 2007-2008 school year and were hopeful that was more than a rumor.

Teaming was an important topic related to planning for both of these schools. In School E, teaming played a huge role in what the teachers chose for reading material and activities, coordinating with each other in language arts and with their colleagues across the content areas for interdisciplinary study. School E had a curriculum map that assisted that team planning across the subject areas. Teachers in School F knew what it was like to plan as teams and seemed to miss that coordination with colleagues very much. Teacher 16 expressed it like this:

> We used to team, we always had teams, we had the eighth grade team which would consist of all five core subjects and whenever possible or needed would be the specials classes . . . but it was always the eighth grade team and the kids would go in this group. Last year our superintendent decided for whatever reason
that we were not going to have teams anymore which became really quite difficult because last year was the year that they closed down our school, so I was a transplant from the school they closed to here. So not only did I come here, but I also lost my team which means I also lost, I’m now independent. I’ll be in class and say all right now you’re going to do this and Mrs. B taught you to do, “I don’t have Mrs. B.” well I am sure that, “we haven’t done that yet” so that’s difficult and we didn’t have that before. But I am hearing through the grapevine that we may be reinstating teams next year.

School F did not have a curriculum map. School E supported the curriculum map with a district-wide book list, which was not part of School F’s structure. School F did have a high school level book list that was not shared with the researcher. Teacher 19 shared a copy of a list of suggested titles for the reading workshop time, but these were not the limit of students’ choices. This book list represented a resource for teachers and students as they were looking for independent reading material. Teachers in School E had a lower district rating, but the highest building rating. The OAT was an area of consideration in their planning, but it seemed more integrated into what they do, not a separate set of materials or skills. Teachers in School F were divided in their views of the OAT. They are working in a district with a higher overall rating than School E, but some, like Teacher 16, still articulated feelings of pressure to do better, yet Teacher 17 believed that if she was fostering readers that they would do well on the tests.
Common Factors

If there are common factors among the variety of circumstances represented by schools and teachers in this study regarding reading curriculum, more than anything eighth grade reading/language arts teachers are concentrating on literary elements based on the content standards and the testing program. Of 19 teachers interviewed 13 mentioned this specifically to somehow say that students need to know the literary elements by name for the test. Teacher 4 said it best: “I think that we are turning them into mini English teachers using correct terminology.” Not one teacher excluded the content standards in his or her hierarchy of consideration when writing lesson plans, but 8 of 19 teachers specifically named the content standards as the single most important factor above testing, more important than student interests or needs, and more important than their own preferences for literature when planning lessons. Several teachers talked about a variety of aspects of the testing program having an influence over their planning including efforts to write their own test questions to resemble those on the OAT to give students practice, working with students using formula writing of one variation or another to practice constructing responses for the short answer and extended response items on the test, and using practice tests as part of instruction. These issues are also part of the activities section later in this chapter.

Curriculum Maps and Book Lists

Two other items were involved in the decision making process for teachers: the existence of a district-wide curriculum map and a district-wide book list divided by grade level. Table 14 shows the breakdown of schools in this study using a curriculum map.
Table 14

Schools Using a Curriculum Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Curriculum Map</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only two districts had mapped the curriculum based on the academic content standards. School C used the academic content standards in all subject areas and divided the coverage by the 9-week marking period. Teachers are responsible for assessing achievement of the benchmarks and indicators at the conclusion of each marking period. School E met during the summer prior to this study to map the eighth grade curriculum in interdisciplinary teams. Common assessments had not yet been developed at the time of the study, but teachers predicted that as the next step in their curriculum planning.

Another factor that teachers discussed in terms of decision making was what Teacher 4 called being “squeezed in the middle.” Only two districts had a curriculum map covering all of the grade levels, but more districts had a book list (see Table 15) that delineated titles for all grade levels, or in the case of School F only the high school. These book lists communicated to teachers at all grade levels which books were reserved
Table 15

*Schools With a District-Wide Book List*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Book List</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td></td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*High School only*

at each grade level to prevent overlap and having students come to a higher grade having already read a novel in the lower grades. Teachers were asked if they participated in the creation of the book lists at each school. Teacher 11 said that School E’s book list was created “13, 14 years ago” and she was a member of the committee then, but there is a procedure in place to add titles by submitting a proposal to the curriculum director. Teacher 9 was not part of the formation of his district’s book list, but said that he has been able to add to the list and that the list does not limit his selections. See Appendix F for the book lists that were collected as artifacts for this study.

In some districts book lists worked out well and in some they were either incomplete or not respected by all of the teachers. In School B the book list was a source
of frustration. Teacher 4 described an encounter with her seventh grade class having already read a book in fifth grade that she had planned to use.

They have classroom sets of a book I just started in one of my classes a week ago and I was told, the kids told me, oh we read this. When did you read it? “Oh we read it in fifth grade and this Mrs. Teacher told us you would be mad at us for reading it because we’re not allowed to read it in the fifth grade but we did.”

Teacher 4 continued with the study of this book because of the different standards at the higher grade level, consistent with the philosophy of the curriculum director in this district that the standards are more important than the material. She conveyed this by saying, “she [the curriculum director] has made it clear . . . that the material is not important; what’s important are the standards and indicators and benchmarks and it doesn’t matter how we get there.” She ended this thought by saying,

I don’t consider the material as much as the standards that I have to cover and she [the fifth grade teacher] has different standards than I do and everybody goes to see the Titanic and you know the boat’s gonna sink.

The conversation in School B had several other examples of this kind of frustration on the part of the teachers and reinforced the lack of communication within the district and even among teachers in the same building. Teacher 4 summarized this concern by saying

So we buy something based on standards, based on student interest, and based on if it, this middle school squeeze that we’re stuck in, that the high school has not taken and that the people below us have not heard of yet.
High school teachers were cited more often than the grade levels below eighth grade as having control over material and thereby limiting eighth grade teachers’ choices. In School D *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) was once an eighth grade selection but was moved to the high school. Teacher 9 said, “The high school decided that [*To Kill a Mockingbird*] should be on their list and not ours,” and so it was moved. School E also credited the high school as having “first dibs” and described the difficulty in eighth grade in particular because of a wide range of reading ability levels. Teacher 13 called it a “catch”

I think the high school has first dibs, but I think it’s hard for eighth grade because I feel like there’s a lot of good books . . . young adult literature up through sixth grade. Then I feel like there’s a lot of good classics you could pull or even books like *The Outsiders* or whatever, but they [high school teachers], between all of their classes, have them all, and then you’re stuck with kids who . . . I really think could be reading more classic type literature or whatever but they’re all taken, so then you’re trying to find something that’s not, that’s young adult still but that’s not. I don’t know. I feel like eighth grade is a catch.

Without a curriculum map and only a high school level book list for reference, teachers in School F wished they had a better idea of what was being read in the grade levels around them so as not to repeat material or to be able to build on students’ prior knowledge. Teacher 19 expressed her desire for better communication about the reading curriculum in her district by saying
I really would like to see them select some stories for each kid to read at the sixth, seventh, eighth grade because I do teach sixth grade, one section of sixth grade, and it would be really neat to know when they come up to eighth grade what they’ve read rather than a raise of hands. To say in sixth grade you were supposed to have read this, in seventh grade, I know that may not be 100% true but it would make things a lot easier to kind of gather cause you know we have so many different teachers teaching it. I don’t even know the fifth graders [teachers] in our district for the most part and if I did I only see them once a year, maybe twice a year at a meeting, and so we don’t even have time for that. But if it was set up you know, make sure that you read these five short stories, one of these four novels, something . . . you should be able to make references to, and have that. I do know that the other problem is one of the teachers in seventh grade taught Poe last year, but only about half of my kids heard those stories from Poe and sometimes you kind of feel like you are wasting your time doing it again but you kind of rationalize it by saying that they’ve matured and let’s see how they can respond to it now and if they remember. It’s the same thing . . . I did Dr. King’s speech two weeks ago and I was at the printer and I saw that the seventh grade was printing things out too and so I thought “oh, next year I shouldn’t have to do it because it looks like they’ve all had a background in Dr. King” but I don’t know exactly what they did with it.

The configuration of curriculum decision making across the district was another important contextual factor influencing the reading curriculum. The variations within this
study of schools with or without curriculum maps and with or without book lists led to many specific decisions teachers made in regards to books, short stories, and activities used in their classrooms.

The next section addresses those more specific decisions and the rationale teachers expressed for making their choices. Instead of approaching this next section from a comparison point of view with like schools, this section deals with issues related to the reading curriculum as its definition was limited in this study to the literary text content standard and guided by the research questions.

Research Question 3

*What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading/language arts?*

This section is organized by the genre of reading material teachers were asking students to read, primarily for whole class or small group instruction.

*Novels*

In both interviews and questionnaires teachers reported using 59 different titles (see Appendix B). Of those 59 titles, *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) and *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000) were used by more teachers than any other titles. *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) was used in nine classrooms in five different schools. *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000) was used in six classrooms in three different schools. Teachers had multiple reasons for choosing novels whether they were among the frequently named titles or a single title in one classroom. Teachers chose some novels because they helped to meet specific standards, especially in cases of interdisciplinary units or historical fiction. Other
titles still allowed them to teach lessons based on the standards but had a theme that teachers believed was relevant or important to their student population. The next section outlines teachers’ reasons for specific novels, beginning with those most often cited.

Teachers using *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) reported choosing this title for a variety of reasons. In particular, Teacher 2 cited “common teen problems” in the novel as something that she believes students can relate to. Another theme is the relationship between generations in the story. Teachers feel that is a good model for students, especially for students who may not have a close relationship with an adult in their lives, to see that they can find that connection with someone other than a parent. The copyright of *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) was discussed, and teachers felt that even though it was written in the late 1960s the issues “are still prevalent” (Teacher 2). Teacher 2 also described the book as successful with her students and a title that she was personally comfortable and secure with and therefore had not looked for anything with a newer copyright.

Teacher 2 uses a writing assignment that asks her students to write a letter to a character in *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) to tell that character how they relate to him or her. This writing assignment gives her a good sense of how students are connecting to the characters, leading to her continued use of this title. Knowing the context, the community, and labeling a novel as “high interest” was also part of the rationale for Teacher 2. Teacher 1 chooses *The Pigman* because it is readily available: “we’ve got a lot of them,” because, like Teacher 2 she believes that the issues in the book are still current, student interest is high saying “they love the book,” and because she and Teacher 2 have
collaborated and Teacher 2 was able to share a lot of resources with her like quizzes, writing prompts, and activities. Teacher 10 also teaches *The Pigman* for the intergenerational theme, more focused on the teenagers accepting the old man rather than the other way around, and as accepting someone who is different in general. An overriding theme for him is using material that teaches a lesson, and the intergenerational lesson in *The Pigman* was a primary example. Teacher 16 says that *The Pigman* covers a wide variety of the standards including similes, metaphors, and mood. She said that her students enjoy the humor and even though it is an old book, the students “like it.” She had picked up *The Pigman* on her own to read one summer and then did an Internet search for resources and found a teacher’s guide that aligned well with the content standards and decided to incorporate that into her curriculum. She began getting class sets from the library and is working on getting the school to purchase a permanent class set. For now she uses library book boxes to teach the novel. Teachers at School E put this novel on their questionnaires, but it was not discussed in the interview.

Fewer teachers talked about *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000), but it ranked second in the number of teachers who use it with six in three schools. It is the only novel that was used consistently in two districts with all of the teachers in School C and School E using it. Teacher 8 likes *Stuck in Neutral* because it is short, it’s exciting, and “the kids always like it.” Teacher 7 listed it on his questionnaire, but that was not a title discussed in the interview. The teachers at School E discussed it as one of the books that all of the eighth graders read except for Teacher 11’s gifted group. One of the teachers in School E found it and passed it on to the group and now they use it as a complement to *Flowers for
Algernon (Keyes, 1959) as a more contemporary story. Teacher 1 was the first one to mention it and described it as a book “everybody ought to read.” She uses it as a read aloud and to teach perspective in writing and a view of the handicapped that what you see may not be all there is. In this case, she also found this book because of a recommendation by another teacher.

Teachers chose the variety of other titles for a multitude of reasons. Both teachers from School D talked about choosing books that could teach a life lesson, things that are relevant to their students’ lives as eighth graders. Other teachers echoed this with their choices of The Pigman (Zindel, 1968) in particular and other titles as well. Other reasons for choosing included teacher interest, some chose books because they like them. Teacher 7 described Full Tilt (Shusterman, 2003) as a story that “some of them like and some of them actually hate” but used the word “selfish” to say that he likes it so he teaches it. Teacher 7 described another title he likes with a strong life lesson when he said, “Stotan! (Crutcher, 1985) I love. They can kind of root for the underdog.” The teachers at School B all felt the same way in terms of life lessons when using Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993) because of the large population of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in the district and social situations in the book that provide issues that students can relate to. Teacher 5 described its appeal like this

The themes that are in it in terms of how our kids relate to each other, when there is a student who’s different, or we have a large population of lower income families, and there are certain social situations that fit.
As a subcategory of the novels teachers are using are novels related to the Holocaust. Seven titles appeared in this study specifically related to a Holocaust themed unit including *Night* (Wiesel, 1972), *Dawn* (Wiesel, 1961), *Daniel’s Story* (Matas, 1993), *Letters from Rifka* (Hesse, 2001), *The Devils’ Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1988), and *The Wave* (Strasser, 1981). In addition a version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in the form of a play in the *Language of Literature* anthology was cited by five of the nine teachers who teach the Holocaust. Interestingly, in all but two of the interviews the Holocaust came into the conversation, but some schools not currently teaching this material talked about that as a topic that had changed over time. In some cases it had moved up to the high school level, or down to a lower grade level, but being eighth grade material at one time in the teaching career of 17 of the 19 participants. *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1958) was a popular choice for many reasons, one being accessibility as most schools are using the same anthology and it is in the textbook. Another reason was the ability of students to relate to Anne either because of the proximity in age between the students and the character, or the common teen-related issues that she faces. Teacher 19 described it like this

I think because of the age range of what Anne is they can really relate to what with her being about the average age of an eighth grade child during her captivity and you know she is developing more interest in the opposite sex and so that also helps them out in that situation.

For Teacher 19, the choice of this material was more about the character of Anne and the ability to relate to students than the time period in history, although she is also a former
social studies teacher and is interested in history. Most other teachers expressed a rationale for teaching a Holocaust piece based on the power of the story and the lessons to be learned about hate, tolerance, heroism, and being mindful of history repeating itself. Teacher 16 said

I have just this real thing about hate, picking on people . . . . So the Holocaust, I just want them to see what hate can do and the tolerance and it’s such a subject that they are drawn into . . . their interest is so high that they do this project and they really get into it over a lot of other historical events, you know Christopher Columbus or you know whatever, . . . but it’s just a real powerful, . . . I still have kids that come back and say that was the best project they ever do . . . they turn it into a 60 Minutes newscast, they do the whole backdrop of a news show and they come in [dressed] in suits and you know do the whole presentation . . . but it does leave an impact on them, so that’s why I do the Holocaust, that’s how I started out doing the Holocaust.

Teacher 17 traveled to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. to learn about how to teach this subject to middle school students and as part of the workshop received additional classroom materials to support her students’ study of this topic. She also brought up connections to current events

My reason for teaching the Holocaust is there’s a lot of good material about it, it’s a very important topic that isn’t covered in social studies and we talk about not only what happened but also how to prevent that from happening again. What can we do to make sure that this kind of thing doesn’t happen again and look right
now with what’s happening in Darfur. That makes it more real to them today that the kids, eighth graders, it just really keeps their interest the second half of the year.

Teachers 7, 8, 9, 11, 16, 17, 18, and 19 all talked about the historical importance of this time in history and this being traditional eighth grade material based on the construction of most eighth grade anthologies and the age of Anne Frank as a character. However, under the current arrangement of the Ohio Academic Content Standards for social studies, World War II and the Holocaust are not in the eighth grade social studies curriculum.

Appendix B contains a list of all the novels named in this study and the frequency of their use. Although this section described the reasons teachers chose some of the most widely used novels, most teachers named three reasons for choosing a full length novel for classroom reading material: to meet a need in the standards, to appeal to student interest, or to use a story they thought taught a particular life lesson. In most cases, it was a combination of these issues that guided teachers’ choices of novels.

Short Stories

If there was one title that reigned supreme in the use of short stories in eighth grade classrooms it was Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Sixteen of 19 teachers in five out of six of the schools asked students to read this story at some point in the year. The one school that is not using it in the eighth grade mentioned using it in seventh grade. This story is taught in the fall either as the first story of the year to hook student interest and motivation or in October as part of a larger unit on Poe specifically or horror more
broadly and in conjunction with Halloween. Teachers had other reasons for including Poe, regardless of the title. Teachers 7, 8, and 13 all believe that all students should read Poe at some point in their lives because of his place in American literature.

Two other authors were named for their literary contributions, Shirley Jackson and Anton Chekov, but Poe topped the list. This is an even more powerful observation when put in context of the entire list of stories. In total, teachers named 72 different short stories that they use throughout the year. In all seven different stories by Poe were named in this study (see Appendix C). In addition to Poe’s place as part of the classic canon, teachers are using his stories to teach literary elements important to success on the Ohio Achievement Test including figurative language as Teacher 16 stated, “because Poe does a fantastic job with metaphors, similes.” Rising action and climax were cited by Teacher 11, and Teacher 19 included vocabulary study. Teacher 18 used “The Tell-Tale Heart” from the anthology version with the original language intact and then uses an adapted trade book version for other Poe stories. She explained this by saying

They are exposed to Poe through “The Tell Tale Heart” to the type of language he uses, when I want to do a compare and contrast with them I drop the readability and so that’s why I use this version [trade book], they are pretty well written.

The second most widely cited title was an excerpt from the novel *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes (1959). The popularity of this story was based on factors different from Poe. One common factor was availability. Four out of six schools used some edition of McDougal Littell’s *The Language of Literature* which features an excerpt from the novel that is labeled in the table of contents as a short story. *Flowers for*
*Algernon* allowed teachers to talk about issues they felt were important for middle school students such as risk-taking, acceptance, and whether it is more important to be smart or to be popular. Teacher 19 said it like this

I usually do it towards the spring when we start hating each other and calling each other names and all that because it’s really interesting for them to realize you know what the other person’s background may be . . . they always get such an impression when Charlie’s at work and then realizes what people are saying about him when he didn’t before. They laugh at Charlie in the beginning but they don’t laugh the second time around.

Teachers who used Terry Trueman’s novel *Stuck in Neutral* (2000) cited similar themes between the stories relating to accepting the disabled and thinking more about how they feel. Some used these selections as complements to one another.

Other short story titles were far more varied, but in general, teachers chose stories based on availability, especially from the McDougal Littell anthology, availability in other collections such as a bound collection of stories for teens or a bound collection of Poe, or from free sources on the Internet where they could print and make copies without violating copyright laws. Many stories were used to teach specific literary elements as discussed with Poe such as conflict, climax, or mood and tone. Teacher 8 uses “Mother in Manville” to teach how to infer the details of the setting in a story. She said,

I know of a good activity, like setting, it works with “Mother in Manville” and if I know that they have trouble with inference of setting, which they do, I know that they have trouble with intended audience, author’s purpose, tone, those are things
I’ve seen them have trouble with on the test in the past, then I will focus on that. I will make sure the story has a very noticeable tone so that we can talk about it, . . . but again those are also the standards.

Teacher 9 teaches “The Landlady” because of its use of foreshadowing. Many teachers talked about using short stories as secondary to the use of novels, either as material to highlight or reinforce a specific skill for the OAT or as transitional or filler material in between novels as the teachers in School E explained,

Teacher 13: The short stories that we choose, short stories, poems, plays, you know just basically kind of pick and choose what we like to do we have, the book is behind (Teacher 15) there, it’s huge.

Teacher 11: It is very good, a lot of different choices

Teacher 13: So we just kind of pick and choose from there what we like to do

Teacher 15: Filler stuff between units.

Short stories were chosen for many of the same reasons as the novels, but with a greater emphasis on literary elements that need to be taught based on the standards. Appendix C contains a list of all the short stories teachers cited along with the frequency of their use. The textbook was the most popular source for short stories and often guided the selection process based on what was available in the anthology. The issue of resources as an influence on teachers’ choices is the topic of the next section.

Poetry, Essays, Other

The pre-interview questionnaire included columns for poetry, essays, and other, but responses to these sections were sketchy. Unlike the novels and short stories, there
was very little pattern or overlap to the responses and as many as 12 of 19 teachers left at least one section blank. The results did not yield the same kinds of patterns as other genres of literature. Three teachers use “The Raven” and “Annabel Lee” as part of their study of Edgar Allan Poe. Four teachers teach Shakespeare’s *A Mid Summer Night’s Dream*; three of those were in School E. Three teachers use Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have a Dream.” None of these genres were discussed in depth during the interviews. Poe’s poetry was connected to the larger study of his work. Teachers chose *A Mid Summer Night’s Dream* to showcase Shakespeare’s comedy, pointing out that high school study of Shakespeare usually focuses on the tragedies, and they taught Dr. King’s speech near the holiday that honors his life and work.

**Resources**

Within the discussion of both the novels and the short stories availability of resources became an important theme. As stated previously, many of the teachers’ choices are influenced by what they have or what they can get for classroom use. Not one teacher cited the textbook anthology as the major source of material for the entire school year, but described it as one resource of many. Four schools are using some edition of McDougal Littell’s *Language of Literature* with copyrights varying in age, some as old as almost 30 years. One school is using the 2003 edition of Holt, Rinehart, and Winston’s *Elements of Literature*. School A did not have an adopted textbook series, but Teacher 2 had a sample box from Holt, Rinehart, and Winston that she was examining for possible adoption for the year after the study took place. She said, “I am looking into a series, an
actual series that Holt, Reinhart, and Winston has because it is . . . aligned to the standards.”

Aside from textbooks, teachers had a wide variety of resources for classroom materials and activities. More often than not teachers talked about resources as being a concern or a factor when choosing materials. Teachers taught a particular novel because copies were available. Copies were available for three main reasons: either they or a predecessor had purchased a class set with school funds, the school librarian had purchased a set with school funds, or the teacher(s) had purchased a set with their own personal funds. Only two teachers cited getting multiple copies or boxed sets from public libraries.

For individual copies of novels to have in the classroom for either sustained silent reading or some self-described workshop format, teachers had a similar variety of sources. School funds were limited, but some classroom libraries were supported by school or principal’s accounts. Often teachers used Scholastic programs, either the monthly book orders with the volume discount incentives, or the traveling book fairs to learn about new titles and purchase them for classroom use. Students were usually allowed to bring in books from either the school or the public library to gain teacher approval for use as sustained silent reading material.

Two teachers represented exceptions to these norms. Teacher 14 used a packaged program from Scholastic called Read 180 that came supplied with groups of novels at prescribed reading levels set to align with computer program modules. In the classroom there were shelves of various other titles, but Teacher 14 said that the students no longer
used those resources. Teacher 8 had been on the committee for *Voice of Youth Advocates* (VOYA) library magazine. This magazine sent out hardback copies of new adolescent titles to be reviewed by middle school students for their publication and so she had a large quantity of books that had been part of that review process, then she got to keep the books as “payment” for doing the reviews.

Teacher 17 attended a professional development workshop in Washington, D.C. on teaching the Holocaust to middle school students. This crosses categories because the conference was at her own expense, but with the conference fees she received $250 worth of books to use when teaching the Holocaust. It was not unusual for teachers to talk about purchasing both class sets and individual titles for their classrooms out of their own pockets when school funds were not available.

Teachers had similar sources for finding new titles to expand either their classroom libraries or the books and stories they use with their students. Scholastic was named as a source for both acquiring new titles and reviewing what is available. Internet searches on popular booksellers such as Amazon came up as a source but was not mentioned as a point of purchase. Libraries or librarians were included, with school librarians cited more often than public librarians. Almost everyone mentioned county-sponsored literacy festivals as ways to learn about books and authors. Both counties where schools in this study were located hosted some kind of literacy or reading festival either annually or every other year that included a book list for students to read in advance, author visits, and additional related activities. Several titles from these festivals
made their way into the curriculum such as *Trouble Don’t Last* (Pearsall, 2002) in School E and *Nothing but the Truth* (Avi, 1991) in School D.

Occasionally teachers mentioned other teachers, librarians, or peers in graduate classes recommending new titles, but none of these represented a widely cited source for materials. Neither were professional development resources such as conferences or workshops. In most cases teachers lamented the fact that a lack of school funds prohibits them from attending such events. In addition teachers cited lack of funds and resources overall as a source of frustration, especially in light of accountability. As Teacher 16 put it:

> It would be nice to have class sets and class supplemental material and resources for the standards we are supposed to teach to meet the test. Give me the material you want me to do instead of me having to either write it or get on the Internet and find it and then this book is going to cost me another $35 you know, but I need it to do what I need to do.

Teacher 2 echoed this sentiment in this exchange and with it, a change in philosophy.

Teacher 2: To be quite honest with you we have had to pull everything out of our hat and . . . to come up with how we’re going to teach what we need to teach for the test and before the test, you know when it was regular proficiency tests, you know we just had to come up with it, we had to find materials . . . I just feel like for years though I think it would be fair to say that anybody in the language arts department who has been here a number
of years, lack of materials because we were doing the whole language
approach you know before there was such a push for the testing.

Researcher: So you don’t feel you can do a whole language approach now with
the testing push?

Teacher 2: Not as much.

With responses like these, teachers were expressing how resources influence their
curriculum decision making. See Appendix E for a breakdown of where teachers are
obtaining the actual materials that they are using with students in their classrooms and
where they go looking for new ideas and possible new reading materials.

Research Question 4

What kinds of activities are eighth grade teachers asking students to do with that
reading material?

Eighth grade reading/language arts teachers who participated in this study are
using a wide variety of activities with the reading materials in their classrooms; the
categories for this section are very broad. Generally, most teachers use projects and other
types of writing at one point or another in the school year. See Appendix D for a list of
activities and teachers.

Writing assignments were one of the areas where teachers said they had changed
by doing less writing throughout the year, but 14 of 19 teachers still described some form
of writing as part of their curriculum whether it was writing a letter to a character, writing
a story modeled after reading material, or writing a comparison and contrast essay.

Projects were another popular selection with 16 of 19 teachers using the word “project”
to define something that they do. It was often difficult to distinguish the difference
between projects and book reports in the interview responses and the questionnaires.
Many teachers described book projects, combining the ideas by asking students to create
a piece of artwork, design a CD cover or book jacket, write a new ending for the book, or
build a diorama as a culminating activity following independent reading. Teachers also
described additional projects that went with the study of other reading material, not only
independent or sustained silent reading. Therefore, only if a teacher used the words “book
reports” was that item coded for that teacher. For example, Teacher 7 described his
assignment as

They’re given a list of ideas to turn in for their book reports, for instance they can
do a CD cover, they’ll do song titles and have to explain how the song title fits in .
. . with the book, they can do a rap, they can do a song, they can do a poem,
poster.
Teacher 10 said

I call them book report projects and I touch on that in what I gave you about the
activities they’re expected to do . . . they have projects to choose from and they
are not allowed to repeat a project so they actually end up doing four of those
projects so some of them are more difficult than others. Some are small scale
artwork like making a mural of the happenings in the book or making a book
jacket, researching the author, making that part of your book jacket or then
researching the area where the book took place and writing a one page report and
typing it.
Both of these teachers also named other projects in their curriculum not related to independent or sustained silent reading. Teacher 9 talked about projects but made it clear that students had no choices of projects. All of his students complete a crime scene investigation project modeled after the television show *CSI*; all students participate in an talk show style panel discussion. Teachers 18 and 19 were similar to Teacher 9, often giving students all the same assignments without a choice of items within the assignment. Teacher 18’s students all read *The Trojan War* (Evslin, 1971) and create pictures modeled after a Greek frieze. Teacher 19’s students all write comparison and contrast papers using short stories that they have read.

Teachers did not elaborate on many reasons for specific activities beyond the connections to standards that threaded through every conversation. Many of the activities that teachers described fit a profile of activities that engaged multiple learning styles or multiple intelligences such as art projects or drama activities, but teachers did not highlight these things during the interviews. Teachers in School C and School E used the term “literature circles” but did not elaborate on what that involved as an activity in the classroom beyond the novel titles that were used.

It was difficult in the analysis to separate efferent response activities from aesthetic ones. With the concentration in the curriculum on standards and achievement testing, very little of what any teacher in this study described as part of his or her curriculum was not connected to teaching the standards or preparing for the test. Teacher 8 described her transition to a standards-based curriculum as her school was writing their
curriculum map and how she chose which short stories she could continue to use by saying

A lot of the stories, we use the literature book, so the short stories all come out of the literature book, . . . and those I probably would choose anyway. I think I choose them in the order that I do or I choose to do work with them based on what standard I am thinking about, you know short stories are obviously fiction that’s the literature portion of the standards.

Only three teachers described curriculum decisions that could be identified as specifically supporting an aesthetic stance in reading. For example, Teacher 1 said,

I feel that these kids don’t read at all. If they don’t read in class, they don’t read at home, so the big thing is can you find the hook that somebody else will take. Again that means challenging the better readers as well as trying to get kids who’ve never read to read something . . . that’s the most fun thing to me, to try to hook a kid up with a book.

This was her rationale for independent reading in class and her classroom library that contained over 900 books. Teacher 3 in the same building said it like this

I believe that when you crawl into a book and the more books you crawl into the better your vocabulary is, the better your sentence structure is, the better your mechanics are. I just feel like the more you read, like anything else, the more you shoot hoops the better you’re going to be at making baskets. You know the more books you read and really, not read because the teacher said here read this and read words, but that you really crawl into I think, its funny because you can watch
kids and you can watch their writing and you know what kind of book they’re reading, they’re hooked on right then. I had a girl a few years ago that was a Lurlene McDaniel fan and every one of her stories would have some kind of . . . illness in it and you know a miraculous recovery at the end. They model what they read and I think that changes as they change what they want to read and I think that’s okay. I think they grow as they do that.

This was part of Teacher 3’s response to change in her curriculum, citing that her approach to reading has not changed much as a result of the standards and the testing, believing that fostering readers aligns with the goals of the official curriculum. Teacher 17 shared her thoughts on aesthetic responses in the context of the response journals she uses in reading workshop, by not only asking student about the literary elements they encounter but also

    I write back to them asking them questions, having them think through what they are reading, how they are feeling about what they are reading and those kinds of things . . . They far exceed my expectations every year because it’s of interest to them.

For these teachers, the goal of fostering a love of reading was built into their classroom activities in conjunction with meeting the standards and testing requirements. That is not to say that the other 16 teachers in this study are not trying to support lifelong readers. Most cited high interest or the ability to relate to characters as reasons for choosing novels, but when asked about their curriculum and their practice, they did not discuss a
desire to have students continue reading beyond the classroom requirements as having priority in their decision making process.

By contrast, teachers frequently discussed activities from an efferent point of view. Teacher 2 provided a good example when she said, “In the past with the extended responses whenever they respond to the questions from the stories or the novels I’ve asked them to do extended or short answer responses,” and she used these responses as practice for the achievement test. Teacher 5 gave this rationale for the research project as an activity: “I’m reading *The Acorn People* and that’s a spin off for our research project which the standards are very broad with all the research that’s supposed to be done in the eighth grade.” She chose the research project specifically to cover the research standards and connected that to a novel. In contrast to Teacher 17 and her example of an aesthetic stance, Teacher 16 in the same building, using the same term “workshop” to describe a component of her curriculum talked about it from a very efferent view by saying

There is a form that has things they are to be focusing on character, conflict, setting, theme, plot you know that type of thing, what are those literary elements, they respond to the journals, they respond to questions that we write.

In all of these examples, teachers have an agenda that is based in the content standards, and they are using the activity that they describe to fill that curricular need. In the end, they are able to assess whether or not their students have met the given standard; if they have taken away the intended information.

Activities did not dominate the interview conversations in the ways that other topics such as novels or standards did. More time was spent talking about influences on
decision making for reading material than activities. With that said, when activities were discussed, they were primarily discussed in the context of connections to the standards, leaving independent or sustained silent reading to occupy a place in between reading materials and activities. Most teachers referenced independent reading in their classrooms in relation to the activity that they asked their students to do to showcase or assess that reading experience. Independent reading was one of the few places in this study where teachers acknowledged that they gave their students choices. The next section explores student choice as an area of curriculum decision making.

Research Question 5

*When, where, and how are eighth grade teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities?*

There was not a lot of variation in the areas where eighth grade students have choices in their reading materials or classroom activities. In most cases, students have choices over independent reading material or over projects, especially final projects at the end of a unit of study such as the Holocaust or a research project designed to meet the research components of the content standards. Table 16 shows the areas of the reading curriculum where students are being given opportunities to make choices.

Only one teacher, Teacher 9, did not name any place in his curriculum where students had choices over reading material or activities. When asked about student choices during the interview, Teacher 9 referred to differentiated instruction and talked about doing a lot of that in the past, but said of this school year,
### Table 16

**Areas of Student Choice in Reading Curriculum**

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<th>Teacher Number</th>
<th>SSR/Independent Reading Regular Schedule</th>
<th>SSR/Independent Reading Not Scheduled</th>
<th>Book Report</th>
<th>Choice within a unit of study: Reading material</th>
<th>Choice within a unit of study: Activities, not using the word “project”</th>
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I’m not doing any of that kind of stuff this year. I have in the past where I’ve done a lot of differentiating instruction where they can choose to do this, this, and this according to that novel but this year I’m just not doing any of that.

In contrast, Teacher 17 had the strongest statement about student choice in her classroom:

I get so much more from them by giving them choices. When I first started teaching eighth grade reading I taught from the textbook and it was very difficult to get them interested in anything because they were just thinking about high school . . . they thought, “Reading, why do we have reading? We already know how to read.” . . . There was a teacher at (School F) who was teaching workshop so we went from [where] I was at . . . [and] we went from those buildings over to see what she was doing. . . . when I saw the way the kids were reading these novels and were reading so much more than I could ever get out of my kids I knew that that was something that was effective, that was working, so I started it and it has evolved over the years. But I get so much more out of them, my kids read so much it’s unbelievable. They far exceed my expectations every year because it’s of interest to them and if they don’t like a book they can abandon a book, they can get rid of it and they can do something else. When we do something out of the textbook, they hate it because I am telling them what to read. They don’t like it. I didn’t like it when I was in school either. Somebody told me what to read. I had to read To Kill A Mockingbird. I hated it in high school. As an adult I love it, but it was because I was told to read it, so I just feel like in middle
school the more choices you can give them the more you will get . . . they don’t realize they’re learning, that’s the best part of it. They think that they get to choose everything they’re doing so they don’t realize how much they are learning, how much I am steering their writing through the journals, things like that, I just think it’s real important.

Other teachers in this study fell somewhere in between the extreme positions represented by Teacher 9 and Teacher 17, with most trying to incorporate some choices into their curriculum but also cover the necessary content standards. Many cited motivation as a factor when giving students choices, similar to Teacher 17. Teacher 10 discussed motivation with reluctant readers in his classroom, giving them choices or suggesting books that he knew followed their interests in things like hunting that helped students to read.

Across the study in one form or another, 13 teachers gave students some choices over the course of the school year in reading material. Many used sustained silent reading time where students could choose a book from the classroom or school library or bring in their own selection to be approved by the teacher for in-class reading time. Teachers required approval for books that did not come from their classrooms for multiple reasons including appropriateness of reading level and variety of genre. Some teachers would not approve a steady reading diet of formula novels or serial writers such as the Cirque Du Freak series or author R.L. Stine. Teacher 18 referred to series or formula fiction as “an all day sucker.” Students had choices over material when assigned book reports, but sometimes the genre was dictated by the teacher.
Literature circles were mentioned briefly in two schools. School C had two of the classrooms using literature circles where students were given limited selection, three to four titles, but students could choose from those options. The choices at School C were part of their Holocaust unit and reflected similar themes. Literature circles were listed as a planned activity by teachers in School E, but that was not a topic of conversation during the interview. All of the teachers in School F described using reading workshop two or three days a week following a model of independent reading and journal writing. All four teachers allowed students fairly free reign with those choices except for the formula novels and series. In addition, Teacher 17 guided students’ choices around reading levels, not allowing them to consistently read what was “too easy” for them. For example, she forbade them to read R.L. Stine to meet the required quota of books for the marking period. Series or formula fiction was not represented on the resource list for workshop reading in School F. This list represented many novels that were award winners such as Newberry Award and Honor books, Coretta Scott King awards, and Michael Printz awards.

Only three teachers allowed student choice of reading material within a unit of whole class study. When teaching the Holocaust, Teacher 3 chose a whole class selection and then allowed students to choose their own book about the Holocaust. Within the Read 180 program, Teacher 14 allowed students to choose from the selections at their designated lexile levels for the silent reading portion of the program. She cited approximately 40 “topics,” from which to choose. A review of the Read 180 program on the Scholastic website lists topics such as UFOs, Mount Everest, Alcatraz, and Heroes.
On the first day of school Teacher 7 allows students to browse through the literature book in groups and find five stories that they think they would like to read and then uses those to plan his curriculum.

There was very little difference in the kinds of activities that students could choose to accompany reading material. Primarily it was either cumulative projects at the end of a unit or research projects that combined reading and research standards. Eleven out of 19 teachers described some variation of research or culminating projects. Teacher 16 spends the entire second half of the year on independent study projects where students research a particular topic such as the Holocaust and create a project that can have a variety of forms. Teacher 7 described the final project after reading Poe as a “bingo card” with an exam as the center square and then projects such as writing a newspaper article or making a crossword puzzle from vocabulary words as other options depending on the row on the card. Teacher 3 uses a variety of art-based projects in many units of study that include making multigenre scrapbooks of their own life stories after reading other biographies and autobiographies. Teacher 13 described the book report projects in her room as dioramas, music compositions, or story writing as examples.

Teachers 18 and 19 were not listed in the table as giving students choices of activities because of the nature of their descriptions when asked about choices. Both teachers described assignments that they give to the whole class and then students have choices regarding how to fulfill them. When asked about choice of activities Teacher 18 referred to the love story unit she had just finished by saying
For example with this last story it doesn’t have to be making out in the backseat, I said there’s a variety of love that one can have. You can have a love story about a boy and his dog, you can have a pencil loves paper, you can have inanimate objects, so there’s a wide range of ways that we can approach that. Usually when they write I’ll kind of give a framework for the writing and then I’ll allow them to shape it and I help them shape it.

By assigning every student to write a love story, providing a framework, and guiding them to follow that framework, this concept of choice did not align with other teachers in this study and therefore was not counted in the table under choices of activities. The same applied to Teacher 19. She asked students to write comparison/contrast papers based on short stories they had read. Students could choose which two short stories, but the end product was still the same kind of essay for all students.

Research Question 6

*How have eighth grade teachers’ decisions changed over time?*

Two main themes emerged when teachers were asked about how their practice had changed over the last three to five years following the implementation of the standards and the shift from the proficiency tests at selected grade levels to the current Ohio Achievement Test structure that includes the eighth grade reading test. Teachers felt the need to work with the actual structure of the test and to make curriculum decisions to support test performance. Table 17 illustrates how teachers are incorporating specific activities into the curriculum based on testing.
Table 17

*How Teachers Incorporate Testing Into the Curriculum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Practice Tests or Workbooks</th>
<th>Construction of Responses</th>
<th>Models Test Construction</th>
<th>Focus on Literary Elements</th>
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Working with the actual structure of the test had several results. Because the achievement test in reading asks students to answer a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and extended response items, teachers felt the need to do two things. One was to model these kinds of questions in language similar to the testing situation in their classes. Teacher 9 uses more multiple choice questions saying, “Some major changes that I have made is [sic] because a good portion of the reading test for example is multiple choice. I’ll give them more of that style question when I’m giving them a test or a quiz.” Teachers in School E talked a lot about working on the students’ writing for extended response items on the test. Teacher 13 explained how that worked.

One thing we found last year is that when we had a section that asked multiple, they wanted multiple things from the kids, the kids would answer the first part and not the rest. We discovered that last year on the practice OAT and then we really worked to try to overcome that.

Teachers in School A described a formula writing program that all subject area teachers were implementing. Teacher 1 said,

We have been doing formula writing . . . I know both of us are doing at least one extended response or short answer to literature because that’s what they make you do and we’ve given them the information about how do you know which one it is, count the number of lines, it’s gonna be topic sentence plus two examples if there’s four lines, topic sentence plus three examples.

In addition to working with students on writing extended response items, teachers also talked about teaching them the scoring methods used on the test and how to examine
the question to look for clues to the number of examples or amount of support necessary to score well. Teacher 16 summed it up like this

Probably the biggest difference that I do is that probably six weeks before the test I have to honestly admit that I do teach to the test. I do specifically teach very certain organizational structure, really focus in on things that I know are going to show up somewhere.

In addition to directly teaching to the test as it draws near, Teacher 16 also described writing the standards on the board at the beginning of most of her lessons to make the alignment explicit to her students. Teachers are aware of the structure of the test and the kinds of questions because many discussed using practice tests with their students or commercial resources such as the *Buckle Down* (Buckle Down Publishing, 2006) series in class to practice with students, especially in the weeks just before test administration. Teachers in Schools D and E had the highest building ratings and also used practice tests or workbooks and worked with students either on constructing sample responses or modeling in their classroom testing the structure of the achievement test.

This leads to the second major theme that emerged from this category. If teachers are using practice tests and spending time teaching students how to construct appropriate responses, something had to be altered to make room for this additional practice. In many classrooms, longer pieces of writing have been eliminated to make room for test practice. As Teacher 1 stated,
I’ve had to give up a lot of the essays, practice writings . . . I pushed a lot of writing. My class always had a lot of writing and I mean essays, paragraphs, you know the extended kind of writing that has gone to the wayside.

Teacher 5 echoed that sentiment saying, “I can’t fit in the writing that I used to do because of the amount of reading that has to be done; however, we still have writing standards that we have to meet.” In other cases teachers had no time for larger projects, as Teacher 8 described in her classroom

I do a lot more in terms of quantity, we do a lot more stories and we do very specific things with that story and then we go to the next story and do something very specific with that story as opposed to taking some time to do a project, to do a poster. I don’t, the fun stuff I don’t do as much, I’m very focused on ‘okay we’ve got setting, now we’ve go to move on and we’re gonna talk about theme’.

Another insight that was revealed through the interviews was teachers’ attitudes towards these changes. Some viewed these changes as limiting their practice while others viewed them as helpful. Teacher 18 described the changes in her curriculum like this, “I’ll be honest with you; I think that instead of just selecting to teach what I love I teach what I know they have to know.” Teacher 8 held a similar view saying, “I don’t enjoy it as much, I don’t enjoy as much now.”

Not all teachers’ reactions to change were negative. Teacher 1 cited the standards as helping her to focus on being more consistent in her approach to the reading curriculum. Many teachers discussed using assessments to improve their teaching related
to curriculum maps or test performance. Teacher 7 connected the standards and the
testing saying

The standards make it applicable to the students and their needs and you’d better
have assessments, measurable assessments as well as immeasurable. I mean you
can just by a show of hands you can tell if the kids, if they know the answer or an
exit slip or whatnot, but . . . it’s definitely made us more accountable to what we
should be teaching.

Teacher 17 is one of the teachers using a three day per week workshop model and
described very little in the way of actual change in her daily practice, but in her way of
thinking about student learning:

I have taken more time to ensure that what I am teaching sinks in, I guess. I don’t
just cover it, say I’ve covered it and move on. If a kid is not getting something I
spend more time with that student on that particular topic. So before I think I just
went through it and if they were being lazy and didn’t care then oh well just move
on, they failed that one we’re moving on. But now I know that they have to know
those standards so I’m much [more] persistent in getting the work done and
ensuring that I’m teaching for mastery. . . . I definitely think that sums it up,
teaching for mastery of the standards and so that is changed, that is probably the
biggest change since the standards came out.

All teachers in this study were knowledgeable about the connection between the content
standards and the testing program and the need to align their lesson planning on a daily
basis to these factors. Many described the climate of accountability and their feelings of
personal responsibility for student achievement in whatever way that was enacted in the individual classrooms.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how eighth grade reading/language arts teachers in one area of Northeast Ohio are making decisions regarding reading material and related activities in the current climate of standards, testing, and accountability. This study identified multiple factors that influence a teacher’s decision making process including the curriculum framework of the school, whether or not they are part of an interdisciplinary or grade level team, if there is a curriculum map or district-wide book list that guides or limits their choices, and in some cases the population of students in their classrooms, whether they are tracked, or what the students are interested in reading. Every teacher in this study used the Ohio Academic Content Standards English/Language Arts (Ohio Department of Education, 2001) as part of the planning process. Some worked directly from the standards book, whereas others used their county checklist, or district curriculum map, having those documents open and ready for reference as they are writing lesson plans. Others described the standards as a running dialogue in their heads each day as they approach their classrooms. Some even mentioned having the standards posted on the walls or written on the board as part of their anticipatory set for both students and teacher to reference. Every teacher was aware of the achievement testing required for eighth grade students in reading; however, the impact of that test as an influence on his or her curriculum decisions varied based on the school district and in some cases on the tracking of students.
Teachers in this study used a wide range of reading materials including selections from textbooks, full length adolescent novels, and materials gained from other resources such as Internet searches and trade books. Teachers also used a wide variety of activities to work with the reading material in their classrooms but projects, research, and writing were the most common as evidenced in the table of activities. Far less common was a variety in areas where the eighth grade students had opportunities for choices within the reading curriculum. Most students were given choices over independent reading materials and within some projects and research topics, but beyond that, teachers were making the decisions regarding what students would read and what activities they would engage in with that reading material.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overview of this study including a summary of its purpose and the methods of data collection and analysis. This chapter also includes the findings and the interpretive theory that are the results of data collection and analysis and the implications for future practice and research.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the reading curriculum in several Northeast Ohio schools to determine what influences eighth grade teachers’ decision making process when they are planning the reading/language arts curriculum, what students are being asked to read in the eighth grade, what they are being asked to do with that reading material, and when, where, and how students are given choices in the reading curriculum. This study was grounded in research about curriculum planning, state content standards and accountability, choice and interest related to motivation and reading achievement, and research that cites the young adult population in this country among those least likely to engage in literary reading after high school.

This was a qualitative study that followed a grounded theory, constant comparative methodology. School principals were contacted by phone and interviews with eighth grade reading/language arts teachers were arranged. Prior to each interview, teachers were sent a questionnaire via email asking for an outline of the reading materials
and activities they had planned for the 2006-2007 school year and a brief description of
the decision making structure of the district. Both the interviews and the questionnaires
were based on the initial research questions:

1. What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers cite as influences
   on their choices of reading materials and activities?
2. How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions
   at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making
   in the district?
3. What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for
   instruction in reading/language arts?
4. What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking
   students to do with that reading material?
5. When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers
   allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities?
6. How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers’ decisions changed
   over time?

The following is a discussion of the findings of this study related to each of the
initial research questions and the themes that were identified during data analysis.

Research Question #1: What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts
teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading materials and activities?

Finding 1: The primary factor that eighth grade teachers cited as an influence on
their choices of reading material and activities was the academic content standards.
The majority of teachers in this study cited the *Ohio Academic Content Standards English/Language Arts* (Ohio Department of Education, 2001) as a primary factor in their decision making process. If it was not the number one reason, it was number two. Teachers in every school described the standards or some configuration based on the standards such as a curriculum map or checklist as being a high priority when planning instruction. They talked about meeting the standards in their lesson planning as a driving force, the topic of constant self-dialogue, and even a contractual obligation. They described lesson plan forms within their respective districts that required alignment to the standards to be included as part of the lesson plan. Other school related factors such as the existence of a curriculum map, a district book list, teaming, or tracking also influenced the teachers’ decisions.

In conjunction with the standards, some teachers also mentioned their school or district’s performance on the Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) as another consideration used in planning. Because of the alignment between the standards and the achievement test, teachers often described the two in concert with each other. Some felt that if they were meeting the standards well, then their students would do well on the test and so the test itself was not a major concern. Others felt that they were meeting the standards but the test scores were still not reflecting results that were satisfactory to the district leadership; these teachers felt that they needed to do better.

Student and teacher interest played smaller roles in the teachers’ choices of reading materials and activities. Teachers named titles of books that they thought their students enjoyed based on class discussion and responses to activities, and there were
some books teachers chose because it was a title or an author they liked to teach. Student choice played very little role in any classroom in this study when it came to reading material read by the class as a whole. Instead student choices were primarily confined to independent sustained silent reading when that was a component of the classroom routine. By and large teachers were choosing what students were reading in the classroom and aligning the choices of those novels or stories based on fulfillment of the content standards. The same was true for activities. Student choice involved the topics for research projects or a choice from a list of possible book reports or projects at the end of a unit of study.

*Research Question #2: How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making in the district?*

*Finding 2: The decision making process at the classroom and district level varied from school to school, but there were a few common factors.*

The academic content standards represented the most common factor affecting curriculum decisions across schools in this study. Although no district approached the coverage or configuration of the standards in an identical curriculum document, every district used the content standards as the means by which teachers were held accountable for students’ performance and the means by which teachers assessed student learning.

This study focused on the literary text standard and this led to another common factor. The literary text standard drew teachers to choose novels or short stories in order to teach specific literary elements such as theme, mood, or setting. The final common
factor was that all of the students in these schools were subject to the same state achievement test, but the level of anxiety and pressure to perform well on the test varied from teacher to teacher, often based on the track of students that the teacher taught or on the individual building’s school report card rating. Generally, the better the students performed on the test, the less anxiety the teachers seem to feel related to meeting the standards.

Other factors were dependent on the particular school setting. Those factors included the presence of teams, either grade level or interdisciplinary, the presence of a curriculum map or district-wide book list, and tracking, especially of the gifted population. These issues were individualized from district to district, but were also cited by the teachers as contributing to the reading curriculum decision making process.

Research Question #3: What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading language arts?

Finding 3: Eighth grade reading/language arts teachers are asking students to read a variety of novels and short stories. There are many common titles among the schools.

Teachers were asking students to read a variety of materials that represented a mixture of full-length novels, short stories, poetry, and essays. Novels and short stories were the most widely used reading materials and were chosen for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, teachers chose books or stories that allowed them to teach lessons that supported the academic content standards. For example, *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) was listed by nine teachers who chose the novel to teach literary elements such as theme,
characterization, figurative language, and mood. Student interest was also a consideration, although the standards came first. Based on previous experiences with the works like *The Pigman* and students’ responses to them, teachers used books and stories they believed students liked. Less often teachers chose a work because they liked it. A few pieces were chosen because teachers felt that a specific author, title, or historical period was important for students to be exposed to or learn more about. Occasionally teachers chose a work because it was part of a larger interdisciplinary unit. An additional reason for choosing literature was availability. This finding is addressed separately.

In some schools in this study, the choice of reading material was also influenced by colleagues and other grade levels. Three schools had district-wide books lists that delineated titles for each grade level to prevent overlap and repetition. One school had such a list only for the high school. Three schools either had an interdisciplinary team structure or a subject area team that coordinated language arts among multiple teachers or across content areas that influenced choices when those teachers worked together.

Teachers were given the opportunity on the questionnaire to include poetry, essays, or other works, but very few teachers completed those sections and there was not enough information to determine themes, patterns, or relationships in genres other than fiction. In all, there were 59 different novels and 72 different short story titles listed by teachers in this study.

*Research Question #3: What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading/language arts?*
Finding 4: Teachers are procuring classroom reading material from a wide variety of places. Resources are an issue in the selection of reading material.

Financial issues played a role in teacher decision making regarding reading material. Frequently teachers cited a lack of resources as a reason for a curricular decision. Teachers taught novels because they had class sets available. Novels were purchased as class sets either in conjunction with the textbook publisher or as free-standing collections. School and public libraries were also sources of novels when school resources could not provide permanent class sets. Often, teachers said they did not seek new titles because there was no money in school budgets to buy them to add to the classroom library. Many teachers purchased new materials with their own out of pocket funds.

Short stories were usually taken from a textbook anthology, and in four out of five schools using a textbook, that anthology was some edition of *Language of Literature* published by McDougall Littell. The other anthology used was Holt, Rinehart and Winston’s *Elements of Literature*. This was also the series the one school without an adopted textbook was considering for the following school year.

Limited funds also limited professional development opportunities such as attendance at conferences and workshops that would expose teachers to new titles and ideas for response activities. Every teacher in the study cited resources as an issue they had to take into consideration when planning the reading/language arts curriculum in relation to materials and professional development.
Research Question #4: What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to do with that reading material?

Finding 5: The activities that teachers are asking students to do in conjunction with reading are also related to the academic content standards.

Activities were also tied to the academic content standards. Teachers designed activities to allow for practice with and assessment of knowledge and skills related to the content standards such as knowing various literary elements or to practicing skills needed for the test such as writing an appropriate extended response item.

Activities seemed to mainly revolve around efferent responses related to the content standards. Teachers were asking students to showcase knowledge of literary elements in journals, to model the kind of writing that is required on the achievement test, to take tests and quizzes, to show their understanding of characterization using character maps or drawings of characters, or to do book reports. Only three teachers in this study talked about wanting to know how students felt as they were reading a book or explicitly said that they wanted students to enjoy the reading or that they wanted to “hook” students by suggesting reading material they thought particular students would enjoy. This was the limit of direct references to aesthetic responses to literature. Whether the activities were efferent or aesthetic in nature, students had few choices over the range of activities that were planned in the classrooms in this study.

Research Question #5: When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities?
Finding 6: There are few areas in the reading curriculum where students are given choices.

Students had very few choices overall in the classrooms in this study. There were two primary areas for student choice: independent reading and projects. Fewer than half of the classrooms in this study cited using independent reading on a regular basis, but those that did allowed students’ choices during that time. However, there were some restrictions on those choices. Teachers had to approve reading material that was not from the classroom library. In some cases, students were limited by reading level or author. Teachers would not allow students to read a steady diet of “easy books” or books in a series.

Students had some choice of activities, primarily culminating projects at the end of a unit of study, such as book reports connected to independent reading or research projects that also helped to fulfill the research standards. These were often connected to a piece of historical fiction. For example, students would read a Holocaust novel and then carry out a research project about that time in history. In many cases these projects had menus of choices and included options that reflected multiple intelligences such as art and music.

Research Question #6: How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers’ decisions changed over time?

Finding 7: Teachers’ decision making has changed to include a stronger focus on alignment of their curriculum to the standards and the achievement test.
In light of the current climate of standards and accountability, some teachers’ decision making has changed. Those who feel pressure from the district leadership to improve test scores are trying to do a better job of aligning their curriculum to the tests and the standards. They are teaching specific skills needed for the test such as writing extended responses. They are modeling questions in their classrooms based on the structure of the test and they are using practice tests as part of instruction. There is a cost in order to add these items to an already full curriculum and that cost is frequently the elimination of many writing assignments that are longer than the extended responses and more project-based activities.

Teachers were divided in their attitudes toward these changes. Some felt overwhelmed and frustrated by them whereas others viewed the standards as focusing their time and energy in the curriculum and helping them teach for mastery learning. Some found intervention programs in their schools that were targeted to specific sub-groups because the school had failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress helpful, and others felt as though they were not prepared to differentiate their curriculum to meet those needs.

*Research Question #6: How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers’ decisions changed over time?*

*Finding 8: Performance on the Ohio Achievement test and the Ohio Local School Report Card influenced changes in teachers’ decision making based on school performance.*
In general, the buildings in this studied varied between *Continuous Improvement* and *Excellent* school report card ratings. In most cases, the higher the building report card rating, the less teachers felt pressure to alter their curriculum to meet the needs of the testing program. In some cases this varied among teachers in the same building and was dependent upon teachers’ student population. Teachers who worked with gifted track students tended to be less concerned about changing their reading curriculum for the test. Teachers in a building with an *Excellent* rating, even if their overall district ratings were lower, did not express the same feelings of pressure or frustration of teachers in buildings that were rated *Effective* or *Continuous Improvement*. Teachers in schools who felt pressure from administrators to raise test scores changed their curriculum to model test format and language, to work on improving students’ writing of extended responses, and used practice tests.

**Summary of Findings**

The methodology used in this study requires the generation of an interpretive theory to explain how eighth grade reading/language arts teachers are making curriculum decisions and incorporating student choices into their classrooms. The theory to emerge from this study is that the state academic content standards and the related achievement testing system are the driving force in reading curriculum decision making. In many respects, that is as it should be and is the reason that the standards were created and aligned with the achievement test. If there is a downside to the standards being the driving force, it is those teachers who view them as limiting and restrictive rather than guiding and supportive. Reading/language arts teachers have no quarrel with teaching
students how to determine and articulate the theme of a story. The structure of the
discipline is not what is at issue. What is at issue is the extent to which teachers place
emphasis on those elements and the emphasis in individual schools and districts on test
scores. Teachers in this study seem to feel that if the test is going to ask students about
the theme of a story and do that in a multiple choice structure, then they need to teach
students to focus on a common definition of the term theme and learn to interpret the
theme of a story in a way that is similar to the language on the test.

The language arts content standards in Ohio do not specify what students should
be reading at any grade level. Several teachers in this study referenced other content areas
either because they teach multiple subjects or they work with colleagues on
interdisciplinary teams, and described math, science, and social studies as having specific
topics, themes, and areas of study identified at each grade level. For example, eighth
grade social studies focuses on the founding of America, the formation of the colonies,
the first Continental Congress, and the results of the American Revolution (Ohio
Department of Education, 2002). The content is specific and confined to the early
colonial period and the founding of American democracy. In the English/Language Arts
standards there are no titles, authors, eras, or themes required for reading material at any
grade level. The standards do require that students be able to identify, explain, and
analyze a variety of literary elements. This allows teachers considerable freedom when
selecting the pieces of material that they will use in the classroom. Therefore, teachers are
using criteria such as meeting the standards, district curriculum maps and book lists,
student interest, teacher interest, and availability to make those decisions. In addition, if
teachers are feeling pressure from the district leadership to raise test scores to improve the school report card rating, they are including in their reading curriculum a focus on skills for the test such as modeling questions, practice writing extended responses, and using practice tests.

Limitations

Frequently cited limitations of a qualitative study are questions of validity as is the case with this study. Because of the small sample and the limited geographical area, this study cannot offer a theory that will apply to a broad set of circumstances. It may only be relevant to Northeast Ohio or the state of Ohio at its broadest interpretation because it is based on the statewide standards and testing program. All states have the same accountability requirements under *No Child Left Behind*, but no two states’ systems are alike so there will be no external validity outside of Ohio.

Time is a limitation in many life experiences and was one in this study. Most teachers were interviewed during a working school day, usually during the teacher’s preparation period so many interviews were limited to the 50-minute period allotted to the teacher. Even though some interviews were conducted after school or on waiver days, the average length of an interview was 45 minutes, about half of the initial projected time when this study was designed. It was possible in that time to get sufficient information to answer the research questions and discuss many of the pieces of literature teachers listed on the pre-interview questionnaire, but not enough to cover every single title.

Another limitation related to time was the pre-interview questionnaire itself. Teachers were sent the questionnaire one to two weeks prior to the interviews with the
intent of having them returned electronically in time for the researcher to review them before the interviews were conducted. In most cases that did not happen and handwritten copies were given to the researcher at the time of the interview. This resulted in some quick decisions by the researcher as to which titles to discuss and how to follow up on information regarding the school district when there was not time to plan those questions in advance.

A few teachers in the study complained about the length of the questionnaire and the time commitment needed to participate in the study. No one declined to participate, but there were some communication problems, primarily when the building principal served as a mediator between the researcher and the teachers to set up the interviews. Often the principals underrepresented what was being asked and teachers were prepared to participate in an interview, but not to complete the questionnaire first. Whether it was because they felt overwhelmed by the questionnaire or did not give it ample time prior to the interview some teachers left areas of the questionnaire blank or gave very little written information. This led to more interview time being taken to discuss what could have been written in advance, such as the structure of decision making in the school system.

A final limitation of this study is that only teachers were interviewed and not students, therefore only there is only one perspective to consider when examining what teachers reported that their students liked about the literature selections or to use to determine categories of responses. The researcher took teachers at their word based on their interpretations to judge what students did or did not like about a literary selection.
Reaching theoretical saturation was not a limitation. With 19 teachers in six school districts, it was possible to find many common themes in the responses.

Discussion

This study investigated how eighth grade reading/language arts teachers in six Northeast Ohio school districts constructed their reading curriculum in the current climate of a standards-based official curriculum and grade level achievement testing. The following section provides a discussion of the research findings in connection with supporting literature and conclusions.

Standards and Testing

Teachers in this study consistently cited the *Ohio Academic Content Standards English/Language Arts* (Ohio Department of Education, 2001) as the main influence on their reading curriculum decisions. The document outlines 10 standards for the official English/Language Arts curriculum in Ohio. This study was limited to examining only one of those 10, “Reading Applications: Literary Text.” Within this standard for grade eight there are seven benchmarks that range from identifying structural elements of plot and recurring themes, to analyzing interactions between characters and the author’s use of figurative language, and explaining techniques an author uses to develop style (Ohio Department of Education, 2001). The benchmarks are broader and cover grades six to eight. Indicators are specific to each grade level within the benchmark. There are nine indicators in the eighth grade standards and they include such skills as a detailed analysis of characterization that would identify the differences between flat and round characters,
analyzing parallel plots and climax, identifying universal themes in multiple works, and examining symbolism in literary text (Ohio Department of Education, 2001).

After an examination of the standards it is easy to see why teachers in this study frequently talked about literary elements as a focus of the reading curriculum and the need for correct and specific terminology on the test. All nine indicators target literary elements. Characterization, setting, plot, climax, theme, foreshadowing, flashback, mood, tone, figurative language, and symbolism are all listed in the grade eight indicators. Theme is covered in two different ways. Students need to be able to recognize themes across multiple works by the same or different authors and to examine how the genre affects the expression of the theme. So it makes sense when teachers in this study discussed at length how their choices of novels and short stories were connected to the dominant literary elements in each selection and how they could use those pieces as examples of the elements. For example, when Teacher 4 said,

"We can talk about what was the major lesson you got from, what was it about this book you loved, what parts bugged you, but you can’t use that anymore. You have to make sure that they understand that there’s something called a theme."

She was relating to both indicators five and six which require that students can “identify and explain universal themes across different works by the same author and by different authors” and “explain how an author’s choice of genre affects the expression of theme or topic” (Ohio Department of Education, 2001). Other teachers referenced novels and short stories that they used to focus on setting, on figurative language, or on characterization based on the benchmarks and indicators that include those literary elements.
A practice test is available on the Ohio Department of Education website to further support these teachers’ interpretation of the need to study specific literary elements in the reading curriculum. On the practice test, after reading a short passage, students are asked to respond to multiple choice questions about how the setting influenced a character’s decision and to choose from four options the statement that best states the theme of the passage (Ohio Department of Education, 2005a). Teachers are using these practice tests in their classrooms and making decisions about reading material and activities based on what their students must know and be able to do in order to perform well on the achievement test. They are using the standards and the practice tests as their guide.

Teachers in this study aligned with their colleagues across the state who participated in the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment, 97% of whom reported using the language arts standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Every teacher in this study used the content standards when planning curriculum. Fifty-seven percent of NAEP respondents agreed that the standards addressed important content (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Teachers in this study viewed the importance of content such as literary elements as a requirement of the achievement test and the accountability system. They did not talk about teaching literary elements as part of the structure of the discipline, something that they would teach regardless of the standards. They named some authors and titles as being important in their own right, such as Edgar Allan Poe or Stuck In Neutral (Trueman, 2000), but no one said that students need to know specific definitions of
literary elements like theme or setting for any reason other than because it was on the test.

The standards are the basis for decisions about reading material and activities and some teachers in this study recognized weaknesses in the Ohio standards. Stotsky (2005) reviewed state standards across the country and criticized Ohio’s English/Language Arts standards for lacking in any specific direction for teachers related to key authors, time periods, or specific works. Three districts in this study had created book lists of their own to specify which books were options at each grade level. In some cases, eighth grade teachers in this study found this restrictive, feeling that the book lists often left eighth grade in an awkward position between the high school and the lower grades. In schools that did not have a district-wide book list, some teachers wished there was one to help them become more familiar with what students were reading, especially in the lower grades. The district-wide book lists helped to give teachers who had them some grouping of titles at each grade level that is otherwise not included in the Ohio standards. It also assisted teachers to have some knowledge of what students had read in grade levels below or what was expected from grade levels above.

Without a framework that is unique to the interests and climate of each particular school district or a curriculum infrastructure that facilitates communication among all stakeholders, teachers are left to guess at what students have and have not read or poll the class with a show of hands. The standards provide a guide that is aligned to the test and is grade level appropriate. If all teachers are following the standards, eighth grade teachers know which literary elements have been taught and to what extent in the grades below
and they know what will be expected of their students when they leave eighth grade.
Without a book list, the same cannot be said for the reading material itself. Book lists like
the ones cited in this study were primarily for whole-class or small group use, not for
individual sustained silent reading. Teacher choice may have been limited by these lists,
but students were not being given choice over whole class material so the book lists did
not affect student choice as it was enacted in most schools in this study.

The bottom line in this issue deals with curriculum structure and leadership. The
standards provide a measure of structure because of the alignment to the achievement
test. Every teacher in this study used the standards. Individual districts reorganized the
standards in curriculum maps or other documents, but did not change the benchmarks and
indicators, thus the content remains the same. Alvermann et al. (2003) cited school
leadership as the first of nine structures necessary for promoting upper grades reading
achievement. To be successful, school leaders, whether they are principals, curriculum
coordinators, or other personnel, need to take the lead to organize literacy instruction that
includes aligning the curriculum with standards and providing support for instruction
(Alvermann et al.). Helping teachers to align a list of common readings to the standards
and gathering support materials to teach those items supports literacy instruction by
fostering communication among teachers in each grade level and between grade levels so
that titles are not repeated or so that they could support interdisciplinary instruction.

Overall, whether there was a district-wide book list or not, most teachers in this
study were supporting other NAEP data regarding the sources of reading material. The
2005 NAEP data reports teachers using a balance of materials from basals and trade
books (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Teachers in this study reported similar results. Only one school did not use a textbook series as a source of material in their language arts program. That school was investigating a series to be adopted in the 2007-2008 school year. Additional NAEP data that was supported by teachers in this study related to the diversity of genre in the reading experience. In 2002 only 35% of NAEP respondents cited a lot of diversity of genre in reading (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). That figure narrows to 26% when talking about fiction (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Teachers in this study overwhelmingly cited fiction, either in full-length novels or short stories as the mainstays of the reading curriculum. The questions in this study were limited to the literary text standard, eliminating any conversation about nonfiction, but there were very few teachers who mentioned any other genres that could have been defined as literary text. The pre-interview questionnaire had sections for poetry, essays, and other works, but few teachers completed those columns and there was no discernible pattern to the material or substantive discussion in the interviews that allowed for these items to be coded in the data analysis process. Within the works of fiction that teachers cited, there was an abundance of historical fiction and coming-of-age novels, very little science fiction and fantasy, very little adventure, and no mystery. Therefore, diversity of fiction was not widely represented in this study either.

The academic content standards are the basis for lesson planning for all teachers in this study. Individual school districts have created their own structures for implementing those standards but they have not deviated from the content outlined in the
official curriculum to create the operational curriculum in the schools. Teachers have significant freedom of choice over the material that they use to fulfill the standards because the standards do not dictate titles or authors, but even the teachers’ choices were dependent on the school district curriculum structure. The next section involves student choice as another aspect of the curriculum.

**Choice and Interest**

The International Reading Association’s Commission on Adolescent Literacy position statement (Moore et al., 1999) listed seven principles supporting literacy growth in adolescents among which are literature that students are capable of reading and choose to read. Teachers in this study were mindful of literature that students are capable of reading. Teachers often described choices of novels based on the ability of their students to read them, and sometimes to be challenged by that reading in order to grow. Teacher 17 would not allow her students in reading workshop to spend their time reading quick, easy reads, yet she kept a few books aside in her cupboard to give to students for whom reading was a challenge. Teacher 11 did not read *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000) in conjunction with her colleagues because she thought it was too easy for her gifted track population, and she applauded her colleagues’ mutual study of *October Sky* (Hickam, 1998) as an appropriately challenging book for all students.

These teachers were operating in contrast to researchers like Richard Allington (2002) who credited “a steady diet of ‘easy’ texts” (p. 743) as essential to helping readers build fluency and strengthen comprehension.
Teacher 18 wanted to introduce her students to the works of Edgar Allan Poe but felt that his vocabulary was too difficult for her students to decode in more than one selection. She chose one selection with Poe’s language intact that was in her anthology and then supplemented with adapted versions with an easier readability level so that students could understand the essence of the story without being lost in the vocabulary. This reflects what Dora V. Smith and her colleagues wrote about in 1923—the need to find editions and adaptations of classic literature that would appeal to students (Hilson et al., 1923).

None of the teachers in this study favored allowing their students to read series fiction, placing it in the category of “too easy.” Teacher 18 referred to that kind of reading as “an all day sucker.” Yet in her research on motivation to read, Gambrell found that familiarity with a book or author was one motivating factor for reading and that some children preferred series books because they were familiar with the author or characters and they represented a kind of repeated reading (Gambrell & Others, 1996).

Literature that students choose to read was another facet of this research. In most cases, students were given choices over what they could read only during independent sustained silent reading. Eight classrooms, fewer than half in this study, named independent or sustained silent reading as a regular part of the curriculum. Biancarosa and Snow (2004) credited independent reading as one of the easiest ways to incorporate some student choice into the reading curriculum. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) stressed the importance of independent reading time in middle schools as a way to increase motivation to read, yet recognize that it is not a priority in most schools. Independent
sustained silent reading is viewed as a luxury only to be indulged in once the needs of the official curriculum have been met (Ivey & Broaddus). One teacher supported this notion specifically by reserving independent reading as an option only for her gifted students and only when they had finished all of their other assignments. Four of the classrooms that incorporated independent reading described it as reading workshop where students read silently two or three times a week and answered questions about literary elements in journals afterward. Outside of these examples, only two other teachers in this study gave students a choice of reading material within a unit of study, both of whom worked with gifted track classes. Teacher 3 described teaching a Holocaust unit that asked the students to read one piece in common and then they got to choose another Holocaust piece. Teacher 7 allowed small groups of students to select short stories from the anthology to incorporate into the curriculum throughout the year. Teacher 14 allowed choices, but they were limited to the reading level selections within the Read 180 program. This trend is actually in contrast to NAEP respondents. When asked to consider their most advanced students and their least advanced, 36% of NAEP respondents (2005) reported giving their least advanced students the opportunity to read books of their own choosing almost every day versus 29% for their most advanced students.

Baker and Wigfield (1999) found a significant relationship between motivation to read and reading achievement. Gambrell (1996) found that children are more motivated to read when they have choices. Children described the most interesting text they had read as also being self-selected. Schraw et al. (1998) found students’ attitude toward reading was more favorable when they had some choice over reading material, even
when that choice was from a pre-determined list. Teacher 17 in this study made a passionate case for the amount of effort and growth she sees in her students by giving them choices in her classroom, yet teachers in this study are not supporting the motivation to read and the subsequent gains that could follow in reading achievement by giving students significant choices in the reading curriculum.

Teachers in this study are so focused on the content standards and the pressure from the accountability system that many do not feel they can relinquish control of the reading material in their classrooms that is so closely tied to meeting the standards. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) found similar results saying, “Middle school teachers contend that they feel external pressure to prioritize explicit instruction over free reading time” (p. 71). In many cases in this study, teachers seemed to be describing curriculum dealing with literary text that Ivey and Broaddus described as a “one size fits all” (p. 70) approach. Teachers were choosing a single text or a selection from an anthology that they deemed grade level appropriate and allowed them to teach about one or more of the literary elements required by the content standards and that approach was used for every member of the class. Multiple teachers in this study described meetings with principals or curriculum directors where achievement test scores were reviewed on an individual teacher basis and the results were that they needed to do more, to do better. This may be leading to the teachers feeling pressure from the district and therefore not in control of their curriculum; therefore they are taking more control within the walls of the individual classroom. It appears that the more they feel pressure to perform well on achievement test, the less room they feel they can give to students for choices in the curriculum. We
know that relevant, challenging, exploratory curriculum is best practice for young adolescents (National Middle School Association, 2003), and to make curriculum relevant is to help students connect it to their own lives. One way to foster those connections is to allow students to have choices, for example, to choose reading material that relates to their interests whether those are sports, music, adventure, or comedy.

There was very little discussion of differentiation in the curriculum for any population, but especially for struggling readers. If there was any difference, teachers discussed how they worked with gifted track students and how that population allowed them to read more classic literature or do more projects. Teachers were not articulating different reading materials or activities for the struggling readers and their needs. The majority of classrooms in this study were not using self-selected sustained silent reading time as a means to foster interest and engagement with struggling readers that many studies support as a means to improve reading skills (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000, Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1998).

It appears to be the tie to the standards that leads teachers to limit student choice and create activities and assignments that reflect a predominantly efferent stance in reading. Reader response and the differences between efferent and aesthetic responses are the topic of the next section.

**Reader Response**

Louise Rosenblatt (1995) defined two kinds of responses readers make to texts. One is the aesthetic response or how the reader connects ideas, feelings, images, and sensations to the text in the affective domain. The other is the efferent response. The
efferent response is usually associated with nonfiction or informational text. It is the kind of reading done to carry away facts or information, usually associated with the cognitive domain (Rosenblatt, 1995). Many (1994) studied the efferent and aesthetic responses of eighth grade students and created a continuum between the two categories of responses. Many found that even when students were asked to take a more efferent stance and analyze literary elements, much like students were being asked to do in this study, efferent responses often contained elements of the aesthetic. Because students were not interviewed as part of this study, no conclusions about the combination of efferent and aesthetic responses to literature similar to Many’s results can be made. However, teachers’ descriptions of the creation of assignments and activities that engaged responses from students focused on efferent response. Teachers were attempting to generate information from students to assess their understanding of the literary elements in the content standards; soliciting aesthetic responses was not the primary goal. Teachers were choosing material to teach the literary elements or to use as practice for writing extended responses based on previous experiences, what they thought that students liked, but they were not choosing those pieces for the effect on students as readers in the aesthetic stance. Probst (1986) characterized this kind of teaching as operating from a conception of literature that it exists to develop basic skills. He said, “We may plan our teaching around specific skills, probably phrased as behavioral objectives, rather than around intellectual content or some other organizing principle” (p. 60). The teachers in this study were doing just that. They were choosing materials that allowed them to cover content standards as a set of specific skills and approaching reading from the efferent stance.
A focus on content standards and efferent responses was not always the sole domain of the reading/language arts teachers in this study. The structure of decision making in the school districts in this study often led teachers to work with others in their discipline or on interdisciplinary teams. The next section involves how curriculum development influenced the decisions teachers made.

Curriculum Development

The structure of curriculum decision making in the school district had an impact on teachers’ individual curriculum decisions in many ways. There was no debate over what Posner (1992) defined as the official curriculum; all teachers followed the state academic content standards in one form or another. It was the operational or enacted curriculum that varied from school to school. The operational curriculum is the content that is emphasized by the teacher and outcomes for which the students are held accountable (Posner). The variation of format of the operational curriculum as it was derived from the official curriculum and who decided on that format affected both what the teachers taught and how they seemed to feel about it. Two districts in this study had created a curriculum map, but only School C seemed to follow Jacobs’ (1997) model of incorporating all grades levels in the building, mapping all subject areas of the curriculum on a calendar based system, implementing common assessments throughout the school year, and most importantly, that the mapping is done by the teachers, not by administrators. Teachers in School E had mapped both seventh and eighth grades across the subject areas, but had not reached the stage of common assessments.
The curriculum concerns among eighth grade teachers varied, but in the end many teachers in this study expressed frustration over a lack of control, except in schools with a curriculum map. That lack of control was in part because of their particular grade level. In some cases the lack of control came from the arrangement of the decision making structure in the school that led to not knowing what those around them in the grades above and below were doing so that they could have better alignment across the district or even within the same grade level. In some cases eighth grade teachers felt they were caught between upper and lower grades leading to limitations in their choices of reading material. Even when book lists were part of the curriculum structure of the district they did not always help, resulting in the eighth grade squeeze discussed in chapter 4 when teachers in upper and lower grades claim titles away from eighth grade. Another problem with the development of book lists was that in most cases these book lists were not reviewed on any regular schedule, only representative teachers were responsible for creating them, and few of the teachers in this study were part of those committees. Book lists seem to be viewed as a one time endeavor, often having taken place many years in the past. A better solution would be to incorporate the creation of book lists into the curriculum mapping process, aligning books to be used in the units that are mapped so that all teachers, reading and content areas, have the opportunity to contribute to the list and it becomes something that is reviewed, revised, and adapted with the curriculum.

Biancarosa and Snow (2004) described a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program as an essential component of the infrastructure of an effective adolescent literacy program. They stated that when a literacy program is well coordinated, teams of teachers
are able to plan for consistency in instruction across subject areas with respect to reading and writing skills, and they are able to communicate in a way that promotes collegiality (Biancarosa & Snow). It was a sense of collegiality and coordination of instruction that seemed to contribute to the positive attitudes of schools with curriculum mapping and effective teams, such as School E, and the lack of those feelings that resulted in frustration, such as in School B.

Teachers in School E appeared to have the most cohesive planning structure, working in grade level interdisciplinary teams with a curriculum map and a district-wide book list that could be amended by submitting a proposal to the curriculum director for approval. Theses teachers talked frequently about being unified and having a unification of the curriculum and seemed to be very satisfied with the progress the school had made in the last couple of years. By contrast, teachers in School A described feelings of frustration. School A does not have a curriculum map or district-wide book list. They have grade level teams, but they are not organized for curriculum development and do not plan units or lessons together. Teacher 2 described the curriculum director as giving lots of statistics and data about test performance, but little if any guidance for instruction. Teacher 3, the gifted track teacher, who did not express concern or frustration like her colleagues over achievement test results, described herself as an outsider in her building, not able to participate on a grade level team and having only one meeting a year to coordinate with the high school’s expectations for her students.

It is interesting to note that School E, with the greatest amount of cohesiveness in the curriculum structure of the school and across the grade level, also had an Excellent
building level report card rating. School A did not have this kind of system in place and had a lower *Effective* rating. However School C, with a curriculum map, was also rated *Effective*. Teaming did not seem to make a difference without added curriculum coordination. School A had grade level teams but did not use them to coordinate their curriculum across subjects or grade levels or implement interdisciplinary units. School B could be said to have a language arts team, but by design of the teachers themselves, not because of a school or district structure of support. School F had teaming in the past but it had been dropped because of financial constraints in the district. Those teachers looked forward to a possible return to teaming when they would again have an understanding of at least what other grade level colleagues were teaching and could coordinate and build on that common planning.

The structure of the academic content standards have attempted to align grades K-12 in the core curriculum areas of language arts, math, science, and social studies to the achievement testing system and build on the structure of each discipline from year to year. It would appear that this official curriculum composition would aid schools in creating a district level configuration that mirrors this organization and assists teachers in planning and coordinating the operational curriculum. Bloome and Carter (2001) characterized standards documents such as Ohio’s academic content standards as a chronological list of skills to be acquired in a particular order. Of these lists they wrote, “Lists subtly set forth a set of activities and definitions of reading that have implications for how knowledge gets structured, how relationships are established among people and institutions, and how people and their activities are defined” (p. 156). Schools in this
study that have mapped the curriculum, defined book lists, and to some extent created interdisciplinary teams, have used the list of skills created by the state department of education as their guide for the structure of reading activities and the relationships between teachers and curriculum.

Implications

Implications for Practice

The results of this study highlight several implications for practicing teachers and administrators. Interdisciplinary teaming is at the heart of middle school philosophy and curriculum decision making in middle level schools. Questions in this study asked teachers about the structure of decision making in the school and the influences on choices of reading material and activities. Every school in this study had the words “middle school” in their names, but not all were operating as middle level schools. If they were, there would have been interdisciplinary teams in every grade level that influenced the curriculum decision making in this study. *This We Believe* (National Middle School, 2003) and *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) are the two seminal publications on middle school philosophy that are the foundations for what is regarded as best practice for middle level education and the basis for the current standards for teacher education from the National Middle School Association (2005). Interdisciplinary teams are one of 15 elements of effective adolescent literacy programs recommended by Biancarosa and Snow (2004). Alvermann et al. (2003) cited curriculum leadership and literacy across the curriculum as important school structures for reading achievement, elements that can be achieved through interdisciplinary teaming.
Only one teacher in this study listed her certification as being grades 4-9. Teachers in this study were not taught the foundations of middle level education as part of their initial licensure or certification programs and no one listed a Master’s degree in middle level education. The school districts in which they teach, with the exception of School E, are not structured to follow middle level philosophy. Interdisciplinary teaming is a component of the infrastructure of middle level schools that allows for “curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory” (NMSA, 2003, p. 19). The incorporation of interdisciplinary teaming would go a long way to assisting teachers in this study and in schools like them to involve more choice, engagement, and motivation to read.

School E in this study was an excellent example of a school using adolescent literature in a teaming environment to create interdisciplinary study. Teachers talked about the October Sky (Hickam, 1998) unit and how they coordinated with the science teachers and the students built and launched rockets which were similar to the character’s experiences in the novel. They described field trips to Hale Farm and Village in conjunction with the social studies teachers to experience life on the Underground Railroad as part of the unit featuring Trouble Don’t Last (Pearsall, 2002). By organizing middle level instruction around interdisciplinary teams and encouraging teachers to work together to read good books and explore ideas related to those books in content area classes, they can meet content standards and motivate students with relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory curriculum.
Interdisciplinary teams with both common and individual planning time are essential to middle grades success and are one way that teachers can find the support that is needed for curriculum decision making as described in this study. On an interdisciplinary team teachers can provide each other with support and guidance by sharing materials and instructional strategies to make learning more successful for young adolescents. On an interdisciplinary team teachers share responsibility for meeting the needs of the accountability system and are not working in isolation. On an interdisciplinary team teachers can share the pressures of the accountability system and work together to create lessons and units that move away from “teaching to the test” models and towards a curriculum structure that motivates readers and learners while meeting the standards.

School districts in this study were not making good use of curriculum leadership and support personnel who were already in place. No one cited a curriculum director as providing needed assistance in curriculum planning. Alvermann et al. (2003) included curriculum coordinators as important stakeholders in shaping the literacy culture of schools and providing support and leadership for generating action plans and supporting literacy instruction. Biancarosa and Snow (2004) listed leadership and a coordinated literacy program as essential elements for effective adolescent literacy programs.

Curriculum Leadership

It is time to rethink the role of curriculum directors as curriculum leaders and developers within a school district. Not in a top-down managerial role, but as a facilitator for team planning, as a resource person for ideas and materials, and as a colleague who is
an engaged member of the teaching and learning community with the expertise and resources to assist practitioners in need of help and support. Curriculum leadership is necessary for successful interdisciplinary teaming and curriculum decision making. It is very difficult for teachers to create effective teams without the leadership and support of the administration in their schools. Teachers in School B were evidence of this. They met outside of school on their own time to plan together and coordinate instruction and resources because the school structure did not even provide them with a common lunch period to communicate as a group during school hours. Biancarosa and Snow (2004) encouraged teachers to take on leadership roles in the absence of a principal or other curriculum leader to ensure the success of literacy instruction. Teachers in School B did that, but it would be better for them, and for teachers in other schools, if the curriculum director and principal in their buildings help to create the infrastructure needed to facilitate those conversations among teachers.

Teachers in this study were often reluctant to give students choices over reading material and activities. They felt the need to keep everything tied to the standards and therefore could not relinquish control to the students when the teachers themselves were struggling to gain control over the official curriculum. Many teachers in this study expressed frustration with the standards as a constant presence in their professional lives. Teachers were required to write lesson plans that showed the alignment to the content standards. The standards are aligned with the Ohio Achievement Test, and the results of those tests were broken down by standards and reviewed with individual teachers. In one case the teachers were required to have the standards posted in every classroom.
This is another area where better use of curriculum leadership could be helpful to teachers. A curriculum director or team leader could initiate professional development such as study groups, action research, or mentoring to foster better literacy instruction (Alvermann et al., 2003). For example, Teacher 2 in this study was interested in using literature circles in her classroom. She had six or eight copies of multiple novels to use, but she did not know much about literature circles and wanted help learning how to get started. This is what she had hoped her curriculum director could do for her, but that had not happened at the time of our interview. If she were able to use literature circles in her classroom, she could meet many of the content standards and incorporate more student choices into her curriculum.

Resources

There are additional implications related to resources. By implementing interdisciplinary teams and strengthening the role of the curriculum director, school districts can create opportunities to better manage limited resources. “In exemplary middle level schools, teachers . . . take advantage of opportunities to vary the use of time, space, staff, and grouping arrangements to achieve success for every student” (National Middle School Association, 2003, pp. 30-31). A team can develop or purchase materials for an interdisciplinary unit more efficiently by planning together (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Single team members can take advantage of professional development workshops and bring information and ideas back to the team for the benefit of all. For example, Teacher 17 and the librarian in her school attended a workshop in Washington, D.C. at the Holocaust Memorial Museum and received $250.00 worth of books to support
teaching the Holocaust as part of the workshop. If teaming were still a part of this school these two people would be in a position to share those materials and the information and ideas that they learned with the whole team. Teacher 16 in the same building also teaches a Holocaust unit but neither she nor Teacher 17 talked about collaborating with each other or sharing resources. Many teachers in this study mentioned using bonus point systems from book clubs and special pricing offers to buy classroom materials. Team coordination of these efforts can pool points and create larger gains for everyone.

Public libraries represented an under-utilized resource in this study. When limited copies of a novel prevent teachers from using a title, public library book box programs are an alternative for securing multiple copies. In addition many library kits include audio books, realia, and other support materials. Public libraries can assist teachers with revolving collections to enhance their classroom library’s stock of books for sustained silent reading, thus adding to the books students have ready access to and increasing the titles from which to choose. Gambrell (1996) cited easy access as one of the four main factors in motivation to read. In addition public libraries can assist teachers with developing student research projects providing books and materials as well as access to databases and indexes that are available to students with a library card.

Professional Development

Another area of implications for practicing teachers in this study relates to professional development. Financial resources for travel to conferences and workshops or purchasing materials were limited in all of the districts in this study. However, there are other ways to embed on-going, sustainable professional development into the everyday
lives of teachers. Jackson and Davis (2000) again focused on the interdisciplinary team structure in middle level education as a way to incorporate professional development by using the common team planning time as “a vitally important period when teachers can discuss ways to improve teaching and student learning” (p. 114). Teachers working collaboratively on teams can create self-study groups, mentoring structures, or action research. The results of this study suggest several topics that could be incorporated into a professional development program during interdisciplinary team planning time:

1. using adolescent literature across content areas for interdisciplinary units of study
2. ways to incorporate more student choice into the curriculum and still meet standards
3. reading groups to explore new titles of novels.

Accountability and Value-Added Assessment

With the impending re-authorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the accountability system originating from the federal government is probably here to stay. The state of Ohio has recently been training teachers, principals, and higher education faculty for the implementation of value-added assessment and reporting which is scheduled to be part of the data reported on the local school report card in 2008 (Seidel et al., 2007). Embedded in value-added is the concept of assessment of learning and assessment for learning (Stiggins, 2005). The current achievement testing system in Ohio represents assessment of learning and is the measure to be used to calculate value-added growth. With the implementation of a value-added system, teachers and schools will need
to focus not only on the end product of the achievement test, but on assessment for learning as an on-going process. Skills-based teaching and teaching to the test will not be effective in a value-added model. Seidel et al. (2007) stated,

Not only does a move from “status” to “growth” bring many challenges to schools regarding accurate measurement of students’ growth (hence the value-added approaches), but the expectations for day-to-day work in schools change when we begin to think “progress” instead of just “achievement.” (Module 1, section II, A)

Those day-to-day changes include moving from a skills-based model of teaching focused on the endpoint of the achievement test, to a view of “curriculum and instruction [that] can be made more meaningful and effective for students, through real-world connections and challenges to students’ critical thinking and engagement” (Seidel et al., 2007, Module 1, section B).

Teachers in this study were focused on the endpoint—the achievement test. It was not clear from the data how schools in this study were beginning to implement the value-added system, but several teachers in this study did describe individual conferences with principals or other administrators focused on how the students in their individual classrooms were performing on the achievement measures. Whether those conversations were based on actual value-added data was not clear, but beginning with the 2007-2008 school year those data will be generated for all students in Ohio and those reports will be made available to districts. The interpretation and use of value-added data represent another aspect of education, similar to middle school philosophy, where practicing teachers do not have the same knowledge base as new teachers because these concepts
were not part of their teacher preparation programs. Without professional development to train teachers to interpret value-added data and learn how to change classroom practices away from a focus on the achievement test as an end goal, teachers will continue the negative perception of these data. Teacher 2 was an example of this perception when she said, “this is how well you did and this is how well you did, not really how well the students did.” The intention behind value-added data is “not to be an evaluation for the individual teacher but rather to serve as a means to monitor the continuous growth for each student, regardless of their achievement level in comparison to grade level norms” (Seidel et al., 2007, Module 1, section B1).

The achievement test is based on the standards, and the achievement test is the benchmark to be used for value-added assessment to calculate student growth from year to year in grades 4-8. Therefore, teachers in this study will continue to use the standards to drive curriculum decisions in reading/language arts. Again, the value-added system emphasizes communication and collaboration among all stakeholders in the educational system and because the majority of the assessments for these data occur in the middle grades, this is one more reason for collaboration and communication in a team environment in middle schools, something that was not found to be prevalent in schools in this study.

*Implications for Pre-Service Teacher Candidates and Teacher Education*

Implications for pre-service candidates and teacher education center on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of future teachers. Teacher candidates in all subject areas need to be knowledgeable about a wide range of literature choices for young adults.
Teachers need to be models as readers and need to know their students’ interests and preferences and then have a wide knowledge of books to suggest and use with their students. Today’s traditional teacher candidates in pre-service licensure programs represent the segment of the adult population that the *Reading at Risk* (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004) study cited as the least likely to engage in literary reading, ages 18-34. If teacher candidates are not entering the profession well read with a background in high-quality adolescent literature, they are not equipped to incorporate it into their practice. The International Reading Association and the National Middle School Association created a joint position paper that supports this idea. It says that all school-based professionals must have both a sufficient knowledge of reading materials to make good suggestions to students and should model reading, have a love of reading, and the skills needed to help children master reading (International Reading Association, 2002).

Teacher candidates need to be knowledgeable about books and have the skills to implement them into the reading curriculum, but they also need to possess the dispositions that include reading as important, valuable, and enjoyable. If as teachers they are not motivated readers, how will they produce motivated readers?

If they are following the pattern of some of the teachers in this study who incorporated independent sustained silent reading into their classroom on a regular basis as a place to begin to give students choices, teachers still need to model reading during that time and be familiar with a wide range of books to suggest to students to help them find the “hook” that Teacher 2 described in this study. They need to be able to recommend a title that will be interesting to a student and have enough experiences with
books that they know a wide range of titles to suggest and can give first-hand recommendations because they have read it too. Having students see their teachers as readers, to have conversations about books, share copies back and forth, compile classroom lists of good books, or collect good books in boxes or special shelves, are all practices that can help to “hook” younger readers.

In addition, pre-service teachers need to understand curriculum development and interdisciplinary teaming (Beane & Brodhagen, 2001; National Middle School Association, 2005; Ohio Department of Education, 2005b). This study showed that most teachers and administrators did not understand or operate under a true middle school philosophy and organization. NAEP data show that 97% of Ohio teachers are familiar with the academic content standards; therefore they must be leaving teacher preparation programs with that knowledge, but they need to learn how to implement those standards in a way that fosters both reading skill and motivates life-long readers. In Ohio, all middle childhood licensure programs span grades 4-9 and those programs must be aligned to the National Middle School Association Standards for Teacher Preparation. Therefore new teachers entering the field understand the importance of middle school philosophy as well as the Academic Content Standards and should be better able to merge interdisciplinary teaming with the standards to truly create an enacted curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory. All middle childhood pre-service teachers in Ohio are also required to complete a 12 hour reading core, further strengthening reading across the curriculum and the contribution of reading in all content areas through interdisciplinary teaming. They need to understand the role of motivation
to read in reading achievement and the role of choice in motivation, two ideas that are important components of a reading curriculum. By preparing new teachers to teach in a standards-based environment with a focus on reading, it is possible to merge the ideas of content standards, choice, and interest. Rather than approaching the content standards as a set of rigid guidelines, new teachers can learn to view the standards as a framework within which students can make choices in their reading materials and activities. The Ohio Academic Content Standards do not specify genres, authors, or eras; therefore, teachers can allow students choices that include the kinds of materials Ivey and Broaddus (2001) and Worthy et al. (1999) found that students prefer such as scary stories, adventure stories, and even comic books. Teachers in this study described reading Edgar Allan Poe in October to create interest in his writing around the time of Halloween as one example. As Ainley et al. (2002) found, higher interest, fostered by choice, can increase both reading achievement and persistence to engage in and finish the reading task. New teachers can learn to prepare lessons that incorporate the literary elements outlined in the standards with more student choices of reading material and activities to help foster interest and engagement.

Important topics for discussion in pre-service education can include:

1. How do teachers find and choose reading material?
2. How do teachers learn about student interests?
3. How can teachers allow students choices in the curriculum and still meet content standards?
4. How can teachers coordinate curriculum through interdisciplinary teams?
Pre-service candidates need to be aware of resources that can support these practices so that when they face the same limitations of teachers in this study they are equipped to deal with them. As new teachers they need to become familiar with the communities in which they teach including public libraries. They need to join professional associations such as the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, and the National Middle School Association, and take advantage of publications and web-based resources for lesson planning, research articles, and professional development, which represent resources used by teachers in this study. Teachers in this study were not working in schools that had the financial resources to support much professional development. Teacher candidates need to learn that professional development is their responsibility and where to find resources to keep themselves intellectually alive.

*Implications for Future Research*

This study included schools in only two categories of the Ohio school report card rating system. Further research using similar research questions with additional schools at both higher and lower ends of the rating scale would add to the findings in this study. In addition, schools in this study were all public schools. An examination of private, parochial, and charter schools using similar research questions would further enhance the knowledge base related to teacher decision making and influential school factors because they are subject to the some of the same accountability issues and an examination of different kinds of schools may yield different results.
Only one teacher in this study reported holding a middle grades license. Another implication for future research would be to study the effectiveness of teachers who are specially prepared for middle grades teaching and middle grades development. This study noted the presence or absence of teams of teachers in schools and how that influenced teachers’ decisions. It would be interesting to discover how specific preparation for middle grades instruction would influence such decisions. In Ohio there has only been a middle grades license since 1998. All institutions of higher education who license teachers for grades 4-9 are required to align their programs with the standards for teacher preparation from the National Middle School Association (2005). There is not yet a large population of practicing teachers with this license in many schools. It would be interesting in the future to revisit the kinds of questions asked in this study as more teachers enter the school systems with preparation specific to middle level philosophy.

The effects of teaming and interdisciplinary instruction have been well documented in middle level education (Dickenson & Erb, 1997). What has not been studied is the relationship between schools that use teaming effectively and the resulting performance on achievement measures that are required under No Child Left Behind. Reading is an essential part of all content areas; a study of interdisciplinary teams that use adolescent literature as a component or basis for interdisciplinary instruction would also merit investigation.

Finally, connecting to the Reading at Risk (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004) survey, a study of the reading behaviors of teachers themselves would be another facet of this theme of inquiry. If the population of readers in steepest decline in this country is the
population of students entering college to become teachers, how will that influence their decisions about reading as they enter their own classrooms? What are the reading habits and behaviors of current practicing teachers? This study did not ask teachers about their reading habits outside of the classroom. It would be interesting to discover if another influence on the choices teachers make is based on their behaviors as readers beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

We know that literary reading in the United States is declining and that there are roots of that problem beginning in secondary schools. We know that middle school students in particular report that what they like to read and what they are asked to read in school are often not the same. We know that there is a standards-based official curriculum that is aligned to the achievement tests. What we now know is that teachers are making decisions related to the operational reading curriculum to meet the standards and to do what they can to help their students pass the achievement test. We know that the standards and the test are aligned with each other and that both are important considerations for teachers. We also know that there are other influences as well that include whether teachers work alone or on a team, if there is a curriculum map or book list to follow in the district. We know that teachers generally choose books they think their students like, but are also books that will help them meet the standards. We know that students get very little choice in reading material.

Reading is an important skill. We need to read to accomplish everyday tasks and to gain information. But we also read for pleasure. We read to experience things that we
could not otherwise imagine. We read to examine the lives of others. We read to find friends. There is nothing wrong with a set of academic content standards designed to align instruction and guide teachers so that students are prepared with somewhat common information and the ability to display proficiency with what they know. At issue is when that becomes the sole purpose for reading in school. Teachers, administrators, and legislators need to be reminded that a literate society works for the benefit of all, and if we are not schooling children to read for pleasure and discovery beyond what is asked on the test, then we are falling short in our commitments to literacy.
APPENDIX A

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE
Questionnaire for Teachers Prior to Interview

Name ___________________

School district/building __________________________

Total years of teaching experience ________________

Years teaching 8th grade reading/language arts ______

Certification/Licensure _____________

Advanced Degrees or National Board Certification ____________________________

1. Please list as many titles as possible that will be part of your reading/language arts curriculum for the 2006-07 school year. Write the title and author (if known) in the box of each genre. (If doing this electronically, boxes should auto fit to contents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Stories</th>
<th>Novels</th>
<th>Poems</th>
<th>Essays</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Title and publisher of textbooks used, if any:
2. Please list/describe the kinds of classroom activities that will accompany these reading selections. This does not mean lesson plans, but general strategies such as reader’s theatre, art projects, discussion, literature circles, worksheets, book reports, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Material</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i.e., writing assignments, test, quizzes, reader’s theatre, literature circles, art projects, research projects, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Please describe the environment in your school or district as it relates to curriculum development and lesson planning. Consider the following questions:

- Do you teach on a team of teachers? Is that team structured by subject area? By grade level? Multiple teams in one grade level?
- Does that team plan together? Do you have team planning time and individual planning or only one of those options? Does the team ever plan integrated or interdisciplinary units of study?
- Is there a building or district curriculum director? How is that person involved in making decisions about what your students read and strategies that you use with that reading material?
- How would you describe your own planning process? What influences or informs the choices that you make for reading material and strategies?
Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions in advance. You may return this questionnaire to me in advance electronically to XXXXXXX or I can take it from you when we meet.
APPENDIX B

LIST OF NOVEL TITLES
### List of Novel Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Animal Farm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anne Frank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behind Rebel Lines</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of the Wild</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing Up Sides</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel’s Story</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devil’s Arithmetic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogsong</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Look Behind You</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t You Dare Read This Mrs. Dunphrey</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downsiders</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fever 1793</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers for Algernon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Tilt</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Tubman: An Autobiography</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Was Here</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iliad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstellar Pig</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jump Ship to Freedom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters from Rifka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max the Mighty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Volume</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>Memory Boy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Night</td>
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<td>Nightjohn</td>
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<td>North by Night</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing But The Truth</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>October Sky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park’s Quest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Running Out of Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarny</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shades of Gray</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stotan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck in Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>That Was Then, This Is Now</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Acorn People</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Adventures of Ulysses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cay</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Contender</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Giver</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grizzly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Last Book in the Universe</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Outsiders</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Pigman</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Rag and Bone Shop</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Trojan War</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wave</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Weirdo</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Them and Us</td>
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<td>Ties Bind</td>
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</tr>
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<td>To Kill a Mockingbird</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trouble Don’t Last</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>When Zachary Beaver Came to Town</td>
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<td>Where Have All The Flowers Gone</td>
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<td>Who Was Ben Franklin?</td>
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<td>Wrestling Sturbridge</td>
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APPENDIX C

LIST OF SHORT STORY TITLES
# List of Short Story Titles

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<tr>
<td>All Summer in a Day</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda and the Wounded Birds</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumntime</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseball and the Facts of Life</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Harmony</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cap for Steve</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Checkouts</td>
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<td>Fall of the House of Usher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flowers for Algernon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gift of the Magi</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Greek Mythology</td>
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<td>Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad</td>
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<td>Hop Frog</td>
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<td>John Henry</td>
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<td>King of Mazy May</td>
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<td>Lost and Found</td>
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<td>Louise</td>
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<td>Lucky Day</td>
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<td>Title</td>
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<td>Masque of the Red Death</td>
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<td>Mother in Manville</td>
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<td>Pandora's Box</td>
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<td>Pecos Bill</td>
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<td>Pit and the Pendulum</td>
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<td>Please Come Home</td>
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<td>Pompeii</td>
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<td>Possibility of Evil</td>
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<td>Purloined Letter</td>
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<td>Quitters Inc</td>
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<td>Rain, Rain Go Away</td>
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<td>Ransom of Red Chief</td>
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<td>Raymond’s Run</td>
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<td>Rikki Tikki Tavi</td>
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<td>Rules of the Game</td>
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<td>Saint Agnes Sends the Golden Boy</td>
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<td>Santa Claws</td>
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<tr>
<td>Searching for Bobby Fischer</td>
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<td>Shadows</td>
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<td>Snow Goose</td>
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<td>Stop the Sun</td>
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<td>Sucker</td>
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<td>Tell Tale Heart</td>
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<td>Thank You M’am</td>
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<td>The Bet</td>
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<td>The Birthmark</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>The Black Cat</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Bus</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Cask of Amontillado</td>
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<td>The Dinner Party</td>
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<td>The Fuller Brush Man</td>
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<td>The Gift of the Mangy</td>
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<td>The Girl in the Lavender Dress</td>
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<td>The Good Girls</td>
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<td>The Hitchhiker</td>
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<td>The Lady or the Tiger</td>
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<td>The Landlady</td>
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<td>The Lottery</td>
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<td>The Necklace</td>
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<td>The Woman in the Snow</td>
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<td>Treasure of Lemon Brown</td>
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<td>Walking with Feet</td>
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<td>What a Thought</td>
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APPENDIX D

ACTIVITIES
## Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Quiz/Test</th>
<th>Journal Writing</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Book Report</th>
<th>Projects (including variety of art and music)</th>
<th>Role Play/Reader’s Theatre</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>Other writing (letters, essays, stories)</th>
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CLASSROOM MATERIALS TABLES
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<td>THE ACCIDENT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL CAPONE DOES MY SHIRTS</td>
<td>18-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENDERS GAME</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOUBLE DUTCH</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**7th or 8th Grade:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAX THE MIGHTY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A WRINKLE IN TIME</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUD, NOT BUDDY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PHANTOM TOOLBOOTH</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clash
Hoot
Great Gilly Hopkins
Flipped
The Giver
Pinballs
School E Book List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7th Grade</th>
<th>8th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Acorn People</td>
<td>Across Five Aprils*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Blue</td>
<td>Animal Farm (OASIS only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cay</td>
<td>Dawn (OASIS only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deathwatch</td>
<td>Farewell to Manzanar*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogsong*</td>
<td>Fever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dust Bowl (OASIS only)</td>
<td>The House of Dies Drear*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Giver*</td>
<td>In My Father's House*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoot</td>
<td>A Midsummer Night's Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The House on Mango Street</td>
<td>Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaguar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Light in the Forest*</td>
<td>Nothing But The Truth*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*</td>
<td>The Pigman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Sides*</td>
<td>October Sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangerine</td>
<td>Holes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Westing Game</td>
<td>I Have Lived a Thousand Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Wrinkle In Time*</td>
<td>Hidden Child of Holocaust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Invasion of the Body Snatchers</td>
<td>Stuck in Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift of the Maji</td>
<td>Trouble Don't Last</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Long Way From Chicago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These books are available in class sets of between 30 and 125 books and can be found in Room 129.
# Read 180 Book List

## School E

### Read 180 Book List

**Paperbacks—Stage B**

Middle School Paperbacks include 40 titles (5 copies each) at four levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lexile 200-450</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lexile 400-700</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alcatraz: Prison for America’s Most Wanted</strong>&lt;br&gt;Narrative fiction by C.J. Henderson</td>
<td><strong>Alison’s Trumpet and Other Stories</strong>&lt;br&gt;Stories by Nat Hentoff, Jean Davies, Okimoto, and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>King of the Hill</strong>&lt;br&gt;Play based on the “Bobby Slam” TV episode</td>
<td><strong>Hiroshima</strong>&lt;br&gt;Historical fiction by Laurence Yep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All in a Day’s Work and Other Stories</strong>&lt;br&gt;Stories by Megan Stine, H. William Stine, and others</td>
<td><strong>Creatures Infest Local School</strong>&lt;br&gt;Science fiction by C.J. Henderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Donner Party: A Diary of a Survivor</strong>&lt;br&gt;Historical fiction by Tod Olson</td>
<td><strong>Destination: Everest</strong>&lt;br&gt;Play by Karen Glenn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hear Me</strong>&lt;br&gt;Realistic fiction by Amy Olson</td>
<td><strong>Frankenstein</strong>&lt;br&gt;Graphic classic based on the novel by Mary Shelley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>King Arthur</strong>&lt;br&gt;Graphic classic by Terry West</td>
<td><strong>Happy Burger</strong>&lt;br&gt;Play by Chuck Ranberg and Patrick Daley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</strong>&lt;br&gt;Graphic classic based on the autobiography of Frederick Douglass</td>
<td><strong>The Secrets of Oak Park</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fiction by Karen Glenn and Denise Rinaldo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Band</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fiction by Dina Anastasio</td>
<td><strong>The Skull Man and Other People With Cool Jobs</strong>&lt;br&gt;By Patrick Daley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Escape</strong>&lt;br&gt;Suspense by J.B. Stamper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School E

*Read 180 Book List*

**Level 3**
- **Lexile 600-800**
  - *Divel! Book Two: The Deep*
    - Realistic fiction by Gordon Korman
  - *Money Hungry*
    - Realistic Fiction by Sharon Flake
  - *Quinceañera Means Sweet 15*
    - Realistic fiction by Veronica Chambers
  - *Score! The Greatest Athletes of All Time*
    - Nonfiction by Adam Grant, Sue Macy, and others
  - *Visitors: Strange Invaders*
  - *Summer on Wheels*
    - Realistic fiction by Gary Soto

**Level 4**
- **Lexile 800-1200**
  - *Among the Hidden*
    - Realistic Fiction by Margaret Peterson Haddix
  - *Classic Tales of Terror*
    - Suspense by H.G. Wells, Robert Louis Stevenson, and others
  - *Double Dutch*
    - Realistic Fiction by Sharon M. Draper
  - *Love Letters and Other Stories*
    - Stories by Kate Walker, Jane Yolen, and others
  - *Miracle's Boys*
    - Realistic fiction by Jacqueline Woodson
  - *Moby Dick*
    - Graphic classic by Terry M. West
  - *Stealing Home: The Story of Jackie Robinson*
    - Biography by Barry Denenberg
  - *The Good Fight: Stories about Real Heroes*
    - Nonfiction by Tod Olson
  - *Trapped*
    - Nonfiction by George Sullivan
  - *Zero Tolerance*
    - Play by Adam Grant
School E

Read 180 Audio Book List

Audiobooks – Stage B
Each audiobook features a narrator and reading coach. The narrator models fluent reading as the students track the text; the reading coach models comprehension, vocabulary, and self-monitoring strategies used by successful readers. Each title includes five sets of audiobook CDs and five paperback copies of the book.

- Daniel’s Story: Historical fiction by Carol Matas
- Esperanza Rising: Realistic fiction by Pam Muñoz Ryan
- Flight #116 is Down!: Fiction by Caroline B. Cooney
- Holes: Realistic fiction by Louis Sachar
- Local News: Stories by Gary Soto
- Oh Yuck!: Nonfiction by Joy Masoff
School E

Audio 180 Book List

- **The Outsiders**
  - Realistic fiction by S. E. Hinton

- **Rimshots**
  - Poetry/prose by Charles R. Smith, Jr.

- **Somewhere in the Darkness**
  - Fiction by Walter Dean Myers

- **The Mighty**
  - Fiction by Rodman Philbrick

- **The Star Fisher**
  - Fiction by Laurence Yep

- **The Stowaway**
  - Historical fiction by Kristiana Gregory
Suggested Book List for Reading Workshop

FIFTY-SOME WORKSHOP FAVORITES

Acorn People by Benjamin  
Anything To Win by Walter M. Miller  
Are You In The House Alone by Richard Peck  
Avalanche by Arthur Rans  
Bird And Butterfly by Annika Curtis Adams  
The Caterpillar by Robert Lunnec  
The Catcher In The Rye by J. Salinger  
The Cay by Theodore Taylor  
Drawin' by Judy Blume  
David's Arithmetic by June Tolles  
Deadly's Court by Carl Decker  
Dogging by Gary Paulsen  
Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card  
Face In The Milk Carton by Caroline B. Cooney  
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury  
Fellen Angels by Walter Deena Myers  
Frank The Mighty by Redman Phillips  
Gandolphom by M.C. Kerr  
Girl Of Magic by Lala Duncan  
The Giver by Lois Lowry  
Go Ask Alice by Anonymous  
Great Guitar by Stephanie Tolan  
Heartbeat by Norma Foz Meier  
Heart Of A Champion by Carl Decker  
Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien  
Tony Willy Nitty by Cynthia Voight  
Jacob Have I Loved by Katherine Paterson  
Killing Mr. Griffin by Lala Duncan  
Kissing Ground by Terry Spears Haas  
Last Mission by Harry Hansen  
Leaving Fauntleroy by Margaret Peterson Haddix  
Lunch by Paul Zindel  
Lure Of The Pack by William Goldman  
Monster by Walter Dean Myers  
Maze by Art Spiegelman  
Middle Of The Truth by Don  
Number The Stars by Lois Lowry  
October Sky by Howard Nemeroff  
Outsiders by S.E. Hinton  
Of Mice And Men by John Steinbeck  
Painting The Black by Carl Decker  
Pigman by Paul Zindel  
Plague Year by Stephanie Tolan  
Summerlight by S.E. Hinton  
Seventeenth Summer by Maureen Daly  
Silver By Norma Foz Meier  
Silver Kiss by Antoinette Curtis Adams  
Snowstruck by Henry Hansen  
Summer Of My German Soldier by Berthe Grewe  
Speech by Louise B雄 Johnson  
Tears Of A Tiger by Sherrie M. Duncan  
Tiger Eyes by Judy Blume  
This Was Then, This Is Now by S.E. Hinton  
To All A Mangerhead by Nolar R. Lee  
Two For Brains A Dance To by Robert Cariner  
Welcome To The Ark by Stephanie Tolan  
Witch Of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare
REFERENCES


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Mills, M. S. (2001). *Ensuring the viability of curriculum mapping in a school improvement plan.* (ERIC document, # ED460141)


Qualitative research in higher education: Expanding perspectives (pp. 255-261).


Reader-response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism (pp. 7-25).

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*Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 41*(8), 604-609.


