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Left to Chance: Gifted Students and Recreational Reading

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LEFT TO CHANCE: GIFTED STUDENTS AND RECREATIONAL READING

By
Sara J. Churchill

A DISSERTATION
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Dr. Kay A. Keiser
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Abstract

LEFT TO CHANCE: GIFTED STUDENTS AND RECREATIONAL READING

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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This qualitative multiple case study explored the factors that impact the recreational reading selections of gifted students. Eleven students in grades four and five participated in the study. The methods of data collection included in-depth personal interviews and analysis of library circulation records and independent reading program data. The Theory of Reasoned Action was used as a framework to examine the answers to the research question and subquestions and three areas of concern were identified. Those areas are: 1) The role of the school librarian in recreational reading selections, 2) The impact of assigned reading on recreational reading, and 3) Gifted boys’ motivation to read.

Findings from this study indicated that though gifted students make most selections independently, they are heavily influenced by their peers when selecting recreational reading materials. However, the school librarian can have an impact on these choices as well. Assigned reading impacts what gifted students read recreationally and how they view the practice. Finally, gifted boys appear to read less recreationally than their female peers. Suggestions for changes in policy, practice, and future research in these areas of concern are provided.
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Chapter 1: Background and Problem Statement

Introduction and Rationale

A typical day in the school library begins early, often before the morning bell rings for classes. Students will come into the library to access computers for a variety of purposes. They may be researching something for a class or writing a paper. They might complete online math practice or take quizzes for reading accountability. While the school librarian gets carts of laptops and iPads ready for the day, teachers come in asking for curriculum materials. After making sure lessons on research and technology are ready for the day, the librarian might take time to troubleshoot technology issues that arise. Throughout all of this activity, students browse the library looking for materials to read on their own time. Adolescents are frequent users of all types of libraries (Craver, 1987; Lin, Yueh, Wu, & Fu, 2014) and as evidenced by the typically daily activities enumerated above, adolescent use of the school library ranges in nature.

As school libraries took shape in the 20th century, they were viewed primarily as a resource for materials. Expensive editions, hard to find books, and volumes of dictionaries lined the shelves with equipment and technology taking up a smaller portion of the collection. As we ushered in the 21st century, collaboration, technology, and information literacy became much larger components of library programming. Librarians have also evolved from being in charge of the warehouse of materials to collaborating, instructing, and supporting the community. Yet even as school libraries have evolved over the past 100 years, reading remains a primary tenet of their mission and major part of what takes place in them. Smith (2006) found in her Wisconsin study that public elementary school libraries averaged almost 730 check outs per week, with schools that
have a full-time librarian reaching 880 check outs. While school libraries have become a hub for technology and information literacy abandoning the notion of reading in school libraries would be unfair. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) emphasizes the importance of reading in several of their position statements (AASL, 2010a, 2010b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Reading is described as being an essential 21st century skill and creating lifelong readers is a primary goal of school libraries. School librarians are responsible for providing leadership in literacy instruction, planning reading promotions, obtaining materials that match curriculum and standards, providing current digital resources, instructing students on how to read and evaluate information in mixed formats, and giving access to a wide variety of high quality, high interest materials that meet the needs of the student body. Though there is much direction on how a school librarian is essential to literacy instruction and the cross-curricular role that reading plays in education, AASL does not ignore the personal aspect of reading and its role in creating lifelong readers. The organization states, “It is imperative that school librarians work with teachers and parents to find ways to instill in students the joy of reading while helping them build the reading habit” (AASL, 2010c, para. 2). In order to do this, the librarian must engage students, find materials of high personal interest, value and promote independent reading, and encourage reading for enjoyment. Clearly, the role of books and reading is alive and well and should be examined more closely. In fact, AASL also emphasizes that providing a vast selection of materials in school libraries is critical due to the nature of the diverse population of children we serve.
Diverse Groups of Students in the School Library

Students today enter schools with diverse needs. Educators will commonly state how difficult it is to reach every student in the classroom where they are at in their learning. In fact, Trilling and Fadel (2009, p. 86) have said that “How to personalize learning and how to differentiate instruction for diverse classrooms are two of the great educational challenges of the 21st century”. These words reinforce what is occurring in schools across the country where the increasing diversity of needs, abilities, and interests are a challenge to schools and school libraries. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, there are 13 different disabilities categories under which children ages 3-21 can qualify for services. These categories can include intellectual disability, autism, visual impairment, and more. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of children having other health impairments, autism, and developmental delays rose between 2004-2012 (NCES, 2015). Additionally, between fall 2002 and fall 2012, the number of white students in public schools decreased and the number of Hispanic students increased (NCES, 2013). In 2009-2010, more than 21 million children in public schools were served by Title I (NCES, 2015). That same year, 18.9% of children ages 5-17 were living in poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). While meeting the needs of this diverse body of students, staff members must also accommodate for those talented in varied areas and those that are considered high-ability or gifted.

Gifted Students as a Diverse Group

While the definition of diversity has been traditionally viewed as students of different ethnic and socio economic backgrounds, realistically speaking we can widen the
parameters of that definition to include all the different labels utilized in education. McMackin and Bukowiecki (1997, p. 2) define diversity to include students with special needs, second language learners, and learners who come from cultures outside the dominant culture of the schools. But the groups of learners in the classroom can also be extended to include students in poverty, traumatized students, and yes, gifted learners as well.

Although the federal government does provide a definition of “gifted” in the No Child Left Behind Act, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) states that each state has the authority to create its own definition for the term “gifted” (NAGC, 2015, p. 13). The 2014-2015 State of the States report explains that 37 out of 39 states that responded to the survey had a state developed definition of gifted (p. 27). Most of these definitions include intellectually and academically gifted characteristics, as well as encompassing creativity, visual/performing arts, and other academic areas (p. 27). The report also details that states vary widely on how gifted students are identified.

Gifted students, though a significant portion of the student body, are often not included in education’s vision of diversity. The United States has maintained a steady gifted population in its schools with 6.7% of students being identified as gifted in 2006 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Though some researchers make a distinction between students that are high achievers and those that are gifted, the terms gifted and high ability are often used interchangeably. Though the program in the research district of this investigation is titled “High Ability”, for purposes of this paper the more commonly used term “gifted” will be used. While variations in definitions and identification processes across states affect the number of students that qualify as
academically gifted, The 2014-2015 State of the States report estimates that there are 3 million such students in grades PreK-12 in the United States (NAGC, 2015). This represents a significant population of students within our diverse school system. In 2013-2014 in the state of Nebraska the gifted population represented just over 6.5% of the total student population (NAGC, n.d.). That means that about one in every fifteen students qualifies as high ability. Though Nebraska does not cap the number of students that can qualify as gifted like some states do, districts only have guidance, not set policy, on how to identify students and can vary widely in the process, which could result in the population being underrepresented. In many state definitions, gifted students are identified by high math and reading scores. Though students can be gifted in a variety of areas and certainly be stronger in math than reading and vice versa, the students in the research district are ones that have qualified as both high readers and with high mathematical abilities.

**Designing Reading Curriculum for Gifted Students**

All students that pass through public classrooms, school libraries, and public libraries deserve the right to be educated to the best of their abilities. The public sector’s goal, be it in a classroom or a library, is to meet the needs of all, even those, like gifted students, who can succeed fairly well on their own.

Teachers often receive curriculum specific support on how to vary their instruction to meet the needs of students that have a variety of skill levels, intrinsic motivators, and personal interests. Reading instruction is a major area of professional development for teachers. Teachers realize that students learn to read in different ways and require a diverse amount of instructional strategies to meet their needs. McMackin
and Bukowiecki (1997) detail a general list of common techniques that can be used to meet the needs of a diverse population. They include such strategies as providing a non-distracting environment, using cooperative learning groups, adjusting objectives and materials of the activity for different learning groups, arranging for one on one assistance, continuously reviewing material, and many more (McMackin & Bukowiecki, 1997, p. 2). Salisbury, et al. (1994) previously detailed three general rules to use when planning learning opportunities: students do not need to work on the same thing at the same time, it is important to vary the type and level of involvement in activities, and adjusting curriculum to match the learner rather than the other way around (Salisbury, et al., 1994, p. 19).

Though each of these studies can apply to any curricular area, both studies were particularly focused on creating successful readers. Designing literacy instruction that meets the needs of all students and fosters their growth is a top priority in elementary classrooms. According to research, reading is the prime component in academic success (Martens, 2007) and thus reading instruction demands a great level of attention in the foundational years of education. However, as the AASL position statement reflects, there is more to reading than simply instruction. While some studies address the needs of gifted students both curricular (Callahan, Azano, Oh, & Hailey, 2012; Collins & Gan, 2013; Nomi, 2010; Tieso, 2005) and emotionally (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002; Wiley & Hébert, 2014), there needs to be more to reading for gifted students. When we are designing reading curriculum and experiences, it is essential for gifted students to have reading experiences that challenge them not only academically, but also recreationally.
Gifted Students and Reading

Despite the differences between states in how students qualify as gifted, similar themes regarding reading ability arise among gifted students. Austin’s (2011) findings were that parents of gifted students reported that they were able to read picture books independently by age 5, at least 6 months to a year ahead of peers. Many reported even earlier success, some even at age 1 up to four years ahead of peers. It is clear that most gifted students can master the process of reading quickly. The matter of reading proficiency is not relevant for this group of students. One aspect that both educators and parents struggle with is that gifted students’ proficiency can be asynchronous with their maturity level (Kingore, 2004; Morelock & Morrison, 1999). Their cognitive abilities are out of sync with the cultural expectations for their age level. The challenge then becomes matching gifted students with reading material that pushes them in a variety of ways and yet encourages them to continue to read throughout their life. For gifted readers, fostering a love of reading and a habit of independent, recreational reading is crucial, yet it is too often left to chance. In fact, research focusing on the independent reading habits of gifted students is virtually nonexistent in the last three decades. With little research and little practice to draw upon, the question becomes can school libraries meet the needs of gifted readers?

As early as 2004, educators were feeling the push to focus most of their time and efforts on students not at grade level, leaving those who were beyond mastery with little direction. In a 2004 survey, leading researchers (Reis et al., 2004) sought to determine what, if any, instruction high ability students were receiving in reading. When questioning teachers who provided little to no individualized instruction, many cited not
receiving training or professional development in that area. However, “most also said that the state assessment procedures (such as the focus on their state mastery tests) had forced them to concentrate on students who were below grade level” (Reis et al., 2004, p. 326). With the focus on data in the educational environment today, one could make the case that the data available should be looked at to see if gifted students are faring any better in current testing climate. LeBlanc (2007) suggests that schools should “disaggregate performance data of gifted and talented students to determine growth” (p. iii). Yet often times, data is simply not provided disaggregated by this category. Special education students are broken out; English Language Learners are separated; even males and females are disaggregated, but gifted students are not even a subgroup on the results of many assessments. Gifted students simply do not receive the time and attention that remedial students receive and more often than not, they are left to fend for themselves. Never is this more apparent than in the area of reading and literacy. Reis and her team (2004) found in her study that “high” reading groups may have consisted of a range of six grade levels or more in one group and that the highest readers were often left to work independently with little or no direction, even when making independent reading selections. Above-grade-level readers attended a reading class taught by an art teacher because those trained in reading and literacy were needed to instruct students who were below grade level. Other researchers have indicated a lack of literature on the attitudes and experiences of gifted readers (Austin, 2011; Carney, 2013; Halstead, 2009; Reis & Boeve, 2009). Reis and her 2004 team state it simply, “Too little research exists on talented readers and whether they have the opportunity to interact regularly with challenging reading material” (p. 334).
However, studies also indicate that though gifted students occasionally receive differentiated reading instruction, it can be very minimal (Austin, 2011; Dole & Adams, 1983; Reis & Boeve, 2009; Reis & Renzulli, 1989; Reis et al., 2004; Wood, 2006). When differentiated reading instruction does take place, it typically shifts from decoding skills to higher level thinking techniques. Compacting, grouping, and self-guided study are all techniques used with gifted learners. Yet for all the emphasis on early, independent reading skills being an indicator of giftedness, there is little attention to (or even mention of) independent reading skills as gifted readers grow older. The focus often lies on instruction, not independence. This type reading is a neglected topic of discussion with gifted students. Reis and her team (2004) documented in their case study how one set of girls was left wandering the library, with no guidance from either their teacher or the school librarian on how to select material at a level that is both challenging and interesting to them. This phenomenon was noted as early as 1984 when Charles R. Martin examined “Why Some Gifted Students Do Not Like to Read”: “While the average ability students are likely to receive help in selecting appropriate material, the gifted are frequently left to select materials on their own” (p. 74). Previous research further reinforces this idea, “Very little programmatic attention is paid to developing voluntary readers, that is, youngsters who will choose to read on their own,” (Morrow, 1986, p. 160). DiGiovanna (1994) maintains that “the ultimate goal of many reading programs is the comprehension of specific text, rather than personal use,” (p. 4). She goes on to demonstrate how educators demonstrate a discrepancy between their stated opinions regarding voluntary reading and their actions to support that. She equates this to a “new form of illiteracy which involves children and adults who are able to read, but choose not
to because they have little or no interest to do so” (p. 12). Other researchers (Austin, 2011; Stutler, 2011b; Wood, 2006) indicate that gifted students are all but forced to look outside of school for recreational reading that provides a challenge. When examining the case studies of six gifted girls who were voracious readers, Stutler (2011b) stated, “There was little reward offered at school for the kinds of advanced levels of learning required by the group of gifted girls” (p. 32). Parents and students interviewed for Austin’s (2011) study of parent/student perceptions of gifted students’ reading experiences often stated how either materials were not readily available at school or the teacher didn’t support the gifted student reading too far ahead of their age range. The bottom line becomes what Reis et al. (2009) identified in their study. “Far too few talented readers encounter challenging reading instruction or even opportunities to read independently at levels that will challenge them” (p. 204).

**Gifted Students and Recreational Reading**

Reading is a fundamental skill to be sure, but reading often opens the door to so much more. Reading allows one to become an expert at word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. It exposes a person to new vocabulary and new ideas. It can make someone think deeply and in new ways. It connects someone to people and places they never would experience otherwise. Ultimately, reading more helps us grow as people. Studies show time and again, that reading is beneficial in a variety of ways. However, these experiences cannot solely exist in the classroom or in a curricular setting. Students need to have reading extend beyond the school day and exist as an activity to partake in for personal enjoyment and growth. Students who spend more time reading recreationally tend to have higher grades (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), frequently
have higher average scores on standardized tests (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2013), have increased cognitive development and vocabulary (Sullivan & Brown, 2013), are better writers and often end up with more financially rewarding jobs (Gioia, 2008). Overall, frequent readers have “better work habits, social and emotional development, language structure, and overall school performance” (Arthur, 1995). There is a vast amount of data to support the notion that those who read frequently benefit from it in a variety of ways.

Reading for pleasure has been shown to be a powerful factor in a child’s cognitive development (Sullivan & Brown, 2013). Students who spend more time reading outside of school have better vocabularies and stronger spelling skills (Krashen, 1989). Reading literary texts encourage students to think beyond their own perspectives and reflect on the emotions and motivations of others (United States & American Institutes for Research, 2010). It is, in general, a highly desirable activity. Numerous studies show increased time spent reading improves several basic skills vital to reading achievement, as well as reading performance as a whole (Allington & Johnston, 2000; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Broemmel, Boruff & Murphy-Racey, 2007; Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001; Guthrie, et al., 2004; Krashen, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Little & Hines, 2006; Moser & Morrison, 1998; Wu & Samuels, 2004). Increased time spent reading also boosts overall verbal skills (Anderson, et al., 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001; Krashen, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b) and gives the reader new understandings of social and cultural constructs (Moyer, 2007). There is even research to support the theory that reading improves intelligence on the whole (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001; Krashen, 1993; Moore & Bean, 1999, p. 3). Additionally, research shows those who read
frequently not only score better on reading and writing tests and achieve higher grades in school but also gain more financially and are productive members of society. Readers hold more financially rewarding jobs at higher levels of professional responsibility. They earn more money per week, visit fine arts venues more often, are more physically active, participate in charity work and democratic civic opportunities more, and have a lower incarceration rate (Gioia, 2008). The benefits of frequent reading are well documented.

As stated, there is more to reading than simply learning to read. There are many types of reading both in the educational context and in life. Students read to learn content, read to find answers to questions, read to fill the time, read to practice reading, and, yes, read for enjoyment. In the research arena, variations on recreational reading takes on many names, each version with its own nuanced differences. Independent reading, recreational reading, free voluntary reading, leisure reading, pleasure reading, and sustained silent reading are just a few different versions of this concept. The linking factor in these concepts is that the materials selected for the task are not required and primarily read for enjoyment. The purpose of these activities is to encourage students to read more and develop a love of reading. For the purposes of this study, we are viewing recreational reading as any individual reading not measured, evaluated, required, or assigned by the school. It is simply reading for enjoyment and personal growth.

While there are studies that examine reading, they often center on curriculum and instruction rather than reading for pleasure. That is recreational reading - reading that takes place outside of structured class assignments and is done simply for enjoyment. Some of the research that does focus on recreational reading examines it with regards to struggling students and unmotivated readers. But as research shows that reading
frequently is so fundamentally important, the diverse body of literature developed in the area of reading needs to benefit all learners, including gifted students. Thus, it becomes important to include this specific subgroup in the research agenda on recreational reading. We must take the time to examine the needs of gifted students. To ignore this important aspect of their development is irresponsible. If we cannot encourage gifted students to foster a love of challenging reading, we will watch them stagnate in their growth. Bagford took a hard line on this topic in his 1981 paper, “Being democratic to gifted children means that they, too, must receive their fair measure of special attention. To do otherwise wastes the nation's human resources” (p. 3).

**School Libraries and Support for Reading**

Given the diverse nature of services and programming libraries provide, research agendas are limitless for school libraries. Studies have examined everything from origami use to interacting with a service robot (Lin, et al., 2014; Shoup, 2009). Many studies focus on how children use the technological aspects of the library - searching the catalog, using databases, performing web searches, creating products, and learning information literacy skills (Hutchinson, Druin, & Bederson, 2007; Ramdeen & Hemminger, 2012; Švab & Žumer, 2015). Numerous studies also exist on the general aspects of school library programs such as library use in general, scheduling, perceptions of the library, and program characteristics (Everhart, 2014; Fox, 2001; Huffman, Thurman, & Thomas, 2005; Kühne, 1995; Shannon, 2012).

What is more difficult to find is research that specifically focuses on the school library’s role in reading. Some major studies, while important, are tangential to the issue. Keith Curry Lance’s (2011, 2000) research ties strong school library programs to higher
achievement scores including reading scores. But Lance does not detail exactly what
reading activities take place in the library that might impact these scores. The number of
visits to the library or the number of check outs a student acquires might be assessed, but
not what the students do during those visits or what materials they check out or even if
more directly on free voluntary reading, but his emphasis lies in how schools in general
and, more specifically, classroom teachers implement such programs. These types of
studies paint broad strokes of what the school library’s role in recreational reading is –
not a fine picture. Perhaps reading is such a fundamental piece of the library’s identity
that the need to develop research to support it seems lower priority than justifying other
portions of programming. Whatever the underlying reason, more research in this area
would be beneficial. Research does show that kids still use the library to obtain
recreational reading materials (Bamise & Oyedapo, 2012; Craver, 1987). Whether it is a
school library or a public library, book selection is still an important activity for students,
especially intermediate age, grades 3-5, students who are perfecting the skill of reading
independently. Yet the number of studies focusing on the library’s role in actual
selection choices is a small portion of research in the field. Many of the studies that do
exist focus on struggling students (Worthy, 1996), or perhaps newer formats of reading
materials such as graphic novels (Crawford, 2004) and eBooks (Margolin, Driscoll,
Toland, & Kegler, 2013; Wells, 2012). It is difficult to find research on how the school
library can support not only recreational reading in general, but specifically for a large
group of the students we serve – gifted students. This is a concern that we must address
with research.
Problem Statement and Research Question

Recreational reading is important and there is limited research on gifted students’ recreational reading. Gifted students need to be included in school libraries efforts to emphasize recreational reading. Since school libraries are instrumental in serving the recreational reading needs of gifted students, this topic needs to be included in the school library research agenda. In order to understand gifted readers better and how we can encourage their recreational reading, this study asked the question what are the factors that influence gifted students’ selection of recreational reading materials? The factors included the genres of materials they are reading, where they obtained the materials, and what their parents, friends, teachers, or librarians think regarding their recreational reading, to name but a few. These factors were easily matched up with the components of the theoretical framework used in the study, the Theory of Reasoned Action.

Theoretical Framework

In order to frame the discussion of recreational reading choice and examine the data gathered, this study made use of The Theory of Reasoned Action proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Recreational reading is a highly personal activity. The selection of materials and resulting activity involve decisions by the student based on their own personal preferences and beliefs. This theory matches those personal aspects and choices well. Using this theory to frame both the methodology and analysis, this study attempted to determine the factors that impact the students’ selection of recreational reading materials.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) maintain that a person’s decision to carry out an action is dictated by their intention to commit the action. This assertion is driven by the belief
that humans are “rational” creatures. For the most part, people consider the effects of their actions when making a decision and develop a disposition to behave accordingly. When a person strongly intends to behave a certain way, they usually will. Whereas most social science researchers have developed formulas of behavior specific to their area of interest, Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory applies to all types of behavior regardless of setting. Whether it is the intent to buy a certain product, vote a certain way, or take part in a risky behavior, the theory still applies. Intention is paramount to determining behavior. However, that intention is comprised of two components: attitudes toward the behavior and perceived social norms. “Generally speaking, individuals will intend to perform a behavior when they evaluate it positively and when they believe that important others think they should perform it” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 6).

A person’s attitude toward the behavior is determined by their behavioral beliefs. If they believe that taking the action will result in a positive outcome, they usually intend to take the action. If they believe that negative results will occur, they will intend to not perform the action. But these beliefs are just a part of the formula. Humans often take the views of “important others” into consideration when making this decision. These are subjective norms and are based in a person’s normative beliefs. If the subject believes that others, ones that the subject values, view the action as a positive, that will influence the subject to perform the action. If others view the action as negative, it will discourage the subject from taking action.

One last factor is how much weight a person assigns each belief. Two people may be presented with making a decision based on the same set of personal beliefs and normative beliefs. However, their decisions may differ based on which belief set they
give more credence to. If the behavioral beliefs lean towards performing the action, but the normative beliefs lean towards not performing the action, the subjects may make different choices based on which belief set they weigh stronger in this situation. In summary, a person’s behavioral beliefs determine their attitude toward the action. Their normative beliefs determine their subjective norm. Each of these components, weighted and added together, combine to result in an intention to perform an action. Barring unforeseen circumstances, a person who intends to act a certain way, usually does.

Figure 1. The Theory of Reasoned Action. This figure illustrates the components of the Theory of Reasoned Action.

Many social sciences will also analyze a person’s attitude towards people, objects, and institutions as part of their formula. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) argue that those attitudes impact the behavioral and normative beliefs, not directly impacting behavior.
Hence, their formula takes those factors into account by factoring them into the behavioral and normative beliefs.

Because recreational reading is an independent action taken by the student. It is important to understand how the student feels about this task and what they perceive the consequences of their actions to be. The Theory of Reasoned Action matches these components well. This research study, attempted to determine what makes up the students’ intention to check out recreational reading materials. Their attitude towards the action (checking out materials) combined with their subjective norms (what others think of them checking out those materials) determined what they checked out. If the students wanted to or didn’t want to read certain kinds of materials (attitude toward the behavior), that provided implications for those providing the materials to the students. Additionally, the students’ perceived social pressures from other students, teachers, and parents (subjective norm) impacted their recreational reading choice. This study sought to identify these two components in gifted students’ recreational reading selections.
Chapter 2 Methods

Research Question

The research question for this study was, what are the factors that influence intermediate age gifted students’ selection of recreational reading materials? Additional subquestions that were examined were: 1. How do parents, friends, teachers, librarians, and other outside sources influence the recreational reading choices of gifted students? 2. What types of materials and in what formats do gifted students like to read recreationally? 3. Do gifted students select different independent reading materials in different locations (school vs. home vs. the public library for example)? 4. What other influences impact gifted students reading selections? These questions aligned with the critical components of The Theory of Reasoned Action – behavioral beliefs (positive or negative) about the outcomes of the behavior coupled with their normative beliefs of what they believe important others think about the behavior. By understanding these key components, we can hopefully make an impact on the final piece of the puzzle, the student’s intention to perform the behavior of reading recreationally. Since these questions were focused on understanding the personal perspective of the participants, this study lent itself to a qualitative multiple case study approach.

Design

Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). This study reflects that goal through the attempt to understand the motivations for gifted students’ recreational reading selections. Due to the small sample size and the qualitative data gathered, case study methodology was the best choice for this study.
This study took a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case-study approach toward data collection and analysis. “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Case study methodology is often employed when seeking to understand a phenomenon rather than attempting to find an explanation (Stake, 1995, p. 37). Personal interviews allow the researcher to build a case for understanding the complex variables that often exist in educational research. Case study research also allows the researcher to gather a deep amount of data from individuals in order to understand the phenomenon being studied. Opponents of case study research enumerate several objections to this form of research. They claim a lack of rigor in the research process, say that it provides little basis for scientific generalization, that case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions, not populations, and that they take too long and result in massive unreadable documents (Yin, 2009, p. 15). However, each of these criticisms can be accounted for in quality case study research. Since Stake in 1995 set forth guiding principals in case study research, researchers have had high standards and a clear process to follow when conducting this type of research. While case study research leaves little room for generalization, it does hold value to examine individual cases and how they play out in a natural environment. Additionally, Stake, Creswell, Yin, and others have developed processes that allow researchers to complete case study research in a manageable fashion, eliminating the need for long, drawn out studies or massive documents. Simply put, case study research can result in a high-quality project that examines an individual’s natural experience in an in-depth way.
Exploratory methodology further supports the goal to understand the particular phenomenon being studied. An exploratory case study is initial research that tries to look for patterns in the data and come up with a model within which to view this data (Yin, 1994). When research questions focus on a “what” (i.e. what are the factors, what is the impact, etc.), the researcher is able to explore the underlying issue and develop appropriate theories to help others understand it.

Despite the wording of the research questions as “what are the factors”, this study ultimately sought the answer to a “why” question. Why do gifted students select the recreational reading materials they do? Using the Theory of Reasoned action as a research base supported the assertion that identifying these factors would lead to the answer of why. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) state that by determining the intentions of the subject’s actions we are seeking to understand behavior, not simply predict it. Case study research helps us to examine a specific population, in this case 4th and 5th grade gifted students at a small town public school, and understand the phenomenon selected. The reasons behind why these students select certain recreational reading materials could only be arrived at with in-depth case study research addressing their subjective beliefs. The researcher did not wish to impact or manipulate the situation, simply to understand the decision being made by these students. In case study research, “We try hard to understand how the actors, the people being studied, see things” (Stake, 1995, p.12).

Using the Theory of Reasoned Action, the questions for the interview were formulated to focus on how the students view recreational reading materials and determining the important others that impact those views.
**Subjects**

In order to understand this phenomenon, the subjects for this study were all intermediate age gifted students from a small town approximately 25 miles north of the largest metropolitan area in a Midwestern state. These students were in fourth and fifth grade at the time of the study and had attended the school for approximately one and a half years. There were 13 students in the High Ability Learner (HAL) program at the time of the study with five students in the fourth grade and eight in fifth. Ultimately, 11 out of the 13 students participated in the study. The school itself had about 490 students in grades three, four, and five. Students were not identified as gifted until the end of third grade, so no third graders were included in this study. This was beneficial to the research process because the students had all built up a relationship with the researcher over the previous year. During the time of the study, there were six boys and six girls in the HAL program and all the students were Caucasian.

In the research district, the High Ability identification process includes four key areas. The first is how the students scores on a Norm Referenced Standardized Achievement Test (currently the MAP assessment). The student must score at or above the 95th percentile in both math and either reading or language arts. The second piece is how the student scores on an Ability Measure, in this case the CogAT test administered in third grade. For the third identification area, the student is given an Academic Performance assessment. This can be either a separate assessment such as the SAGES 2 Screening or their state content area assessment (NeSA) scores can be used. Finally, the student is given a Gifted Behavioral Characteristics Rating (Blair Community Schools, 2015). All of these students have scored well in the area of reading and, like many gifted
students, are typically both high and voracious readers. Interviewing these students provided insight into the recreational reading choices of gifted students.

**Interview Questions**

In order to gain that insight and understand this phenomenon in a case study format, the questions for the interview were crafted using the Theory of Reasoned Action as a guide. The primary components of the Theory of Reasoned Action are the subject’s attitude towards the behavior and their subjective beliefs towards the behavior, which is built on what they perceive others to think about the behavior. Therefore, the interview questions attempted to answer what the student’s attitude is towards certain recreational reading materials and who or what influenced their recreational reading choices.

The interview consisted originally of four primary questions focusing on recreational reading. An additional question was added during the interview process. Students were informed prior to the interview that they were to answer with their own thoughts. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers. The researcher just wanted to know what they think. A detailed copy of the narrative read to the students prior to the interview, the possible follow up questions and prompts for the interview questions, as well as the introductory letter to the parents and students regarding the study, are included in the appendix.

1. “What would you read for fun in your free time? It can be anything you would read.”
2. “How often do you read things like that?”
3. “What are all the ways that help you decide what to read for fun?”
4. “Where do you get what you read for fun?”
5. “How do you find books that are challenging enough?”

After that portion of the interview was completed, the interviewer turned to the documentation portion of the study. The student was given a paper with their check out record for the school year, and in some cases, the year before. The student was asked to highlight which books they read for fun. The interviewer then asked:

1. “The books that you didn’t highlight, did you not read those for fun? Why didn’t you highlight those?”

2. "Did someone or something inspire you to pick the books you did highlight?"

3. "What did you enjoy or not enjoy about them?" The student might be prompted to further explain how/why it was enjoyable.

4. "Do you think you'll read some other things because of these? Why?"

5. “Is there anything memorable that you have read for fun that we don’t have here in the library?”

The interviewer asked one final question at the conclusion of the interview in order to address possible related topics that had not been covered in the interview already.

1. “Is there anything else you want to tell me about reading for fun?”

The research questions were worded in simple, age-appropriate fashion. They were also worded in a general enough way that allowed the researcher to use follow up prompts to further the ideas presented by the participant. Stake (1995) says that, “The researcher makes a flexible list of questions, progressively redefines issues, and seizes opportunities to learn the unexpected” (p. 29). The interview questions were vetted by
current school librarians and educators and administered to two students of the same age that do not qualify as gifted for the purpose of construct validity.

**Procedures**

Stake (1995) maintains that the goal of case study research is to determine the multiple perspectives involved in a phenomenon and the interview is the “main road” to seeing these “multiple realities” (p. 64). The focus in case study research is the story that each participant has to contribute to the understanding of the issue. A good case study interview allows each participant to tell their story with the researcher using a short list of questions to guide the process. Stake (1995) and Yin (2009) also refer to documentation, where physical records can help the researcher record activity they are not able to directly observe and use it to validate the evidence obtained in other ways. Thus, this researcher relied on both interview and documentation, in the form of the record of checked out library materials and the data from the independent reading program used at the research location, as the main methods of data collection.

After receiving approval from IRB and the district’s superintendent, a letter was sent to the parents of the students in the High Ability Learner program. This letter included a consent form for both the parents and students. The researcher followed up about the forms as necessary. The students have a set High Ability class time of around 225 minutes per week and a fixed library/technology class time that varies between 30 and 60 minutes every four days. Five minutes of the High Ability class time was used for the researcher to explain the project to the students and answer any questions they had prior to the interviews. For interview purposes, individual students were pulled during a 30-minute time period that occurred during the library and technology instruction block
and was at the end of a lesson. Typically, the classroom teachers use this time as silent reading time, library check out, or study hall, so the time taken for the interview did not impact instruction greatly. A laptop was used to obtain audio recordings of the interviews while the researcher kept notes. The researcher took care to only mark things when necessary so as not to distract from the participant’s discussion. Additionally, a list of materials checked out from the school library in the months leading up to the interview was provided to the students in order to document items that they read for recreation and provide a concrete discussion point during the interview on why they chose those selections. Students were asked to highlight which books they read for fun and to explain why they selected those materials and if they thought they might check out other materials because of those books.

The interviews were transcribed for analysis and coding. Stake (1995) tells us that coding, along with direct interpretation, is a key component of case study reports. And Saldana (2009, p. 5) says that “one of the coder’s primary goals is to find these repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data”. Thus, this case-study research project relies on coding to discover emerging themes and patterns across the participants. While coding the transcripts, the three primary areas of interest were based on the Theory of Reasoned Action. The coding system focused on beliefs towards behavior, normative beliefs, and the weight assigned to one or the other. Further coding identified positive beliefs towards behavior, negative beliefs towards behavior, and what “important others” contributed to the participant’s normative beliefs. Dedoose, a research management software, allowed the researcher to
code and manage the data electronically. Yin (2009, p. 136) refers to computerized data analysis software as “an able assistant and reliable tool”.

Interviewing children comes with a number of ethical concerns. Dalli and Te One (2012, p. 231) state that, “Research involving children requires a continually responsive stance that takes account of children’s participation rights within their individual, social, and cultural context throughout all phases of the research”. Researchers must take note of the five key principles identified by Dalli and Te One (2012) while performing research with children in order to respect the role of this unique participant. Those are: Creating time and space for the children, developing an ecology of trust, examining consents, assents, and the transparency of the research process, investing of time and resources, and engaging in respectful practices with children and communities. This research study attempted to create a free atmosphere of discussion during the interviews in a time and space that was comfortable for the child and encouraged their participation. Consent was be obtained by both the parents and the students before the study began. As the school librarian for these students for over a year, a relationship with the students had already been fostered, but the researcher continues to build trust with the students and will protect their privacy and identity when sharing the results of the study.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher was the school librarian for the students involved in the study. The relationship that exists between the researcher and the subjects is something that needs to be considered and weighed. Dalli and Te One (2012) emphasize how important building a relationship is when interviewing children. The fact that a relationship already existed between the researcher and the subjects was helpful in encouraging the students
to trust that the researcher had their best interests at heart. The students might not have been willing to discuss the influences on their recreational reading habits with someone that they didn’t know or who didn’t have a vested interest in their recreational reading habits. Therefore having the school librarian as the researcher might have proven to yield more data than otherwise. However, the researcher needed to be careful to not abuse this trust and it is possible that the existing relationship might have potentially colored the data being obtained. The students may have made statements that they thought the researcher would approve of when they may not have been accurate statements.

However, this detail actually factors in to the theoretical framework presented as the students may have seen the school librarian as an “important other” and considered what they perceived her opinions to be when making their statements. The researcher encouraged the students to make statements that were true regardless of how they might have been perceived by their school librarian, however, at ten years old, this might have been difficult for the students to do.

As a school librarian, the researcher also brought a bias that reading is a recreational past time and is a positive and enjoyable experience. Her own history, as a reader who chose more advanced materials than her peers, and that of being the mother of an advanced reader, also factored into the experiences and opinions on which this research study was based.

**Significance**

Stake (1995) says, “The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does” (p. 8). This study provides
those involved with gifted readers the opportunity to find out who they are and what they do as readers.

As librarians and teachers, our goal is to serve all students including this particular population - which is often overlooked. This study has the potential to impact not only school librarians and teachers, but also gifted coordinators and parents of gifted students and how they provide recreational reading experiences to gifted students. These “important others” in the student’s life can find materials that match student interest, provide materials to better suit their emotional needs, and help them grow even more in their education and watch it pay off in future endeavors. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge on independent reading and may be of use to all students, not just gifted students. As already demonstrated, those who read deeply and widely reap the rewards tenfold. Better education, better jobs, more involved in society, stronger empathy with others, and more are all byproducts of strong reading habits. These habits cannot develop without a desire to read and a connection to the material. When educators better understand the personal needs and interests of the children served, they can provide the students with a better education and a better way of life.
Chapter 3 Case Studies

The research question for this study was what are the factors that influence gifted students’ selection of recreational reading materials? Additional sub questions examined were: 1. What types of materials do gifted students like to read recreationally? 2. How do parents, friends, teachers, librarians, and other outside sources influence the recreational reading choices of gifted students? 3. What other influences impact gifted students reading selections? 4. Do gifted students select different independent reading materials in different locations (school vs. home vs. the public library for example)? In order to answer these questions, eleven students identified as high ability students in the research district were interviewed over about a two-week period and asked about their recreational reading choices. Additionally, they were asked to identify books that they checked out from the school library that they had read for fun. The interviews were coded and the data from their school library circulations, as well as their progress towards goals in the school’s independent reading program were analyzed.

Site Description and Overview

At the research location there were many reading programs in place and available to the students to promote, encourage, and track independent reading. Teachers across the building use the independent reading program Accelerated Reader (AR) to determine appropriate reading level materials for students and track reading comprehension of independent reading. This system uses three forms of measure to help students determine “appropriateness”. The first is the reading level. This focuses primarily on the difficulty of the vocabulary in the book. The second is the number of points assigned to the book. This is related to the length and number of words in a book. Finally, each book also
receives an interest level, which addresses the concepts and maturity of the material in the book. Use of this program is not structured at the school, though teachers do receive information on best practices regarding its use. Teacher rigidity regarding the program’s implementation varies widely throughout the building. The fourth grade students involved in the study were not exposed to AR as much as third grade students. This is because they moved into the research school as third graders along with the third grade teachers, after several years of being located at different schools in the district. The AR program was new to the third grade teachers and was not widely implemented the grade level that first year back at the research location. Due to the use of the program at the site, the fiction section of the library is organized by AR reading level. This was referenced by students several times during the interviews.

The school librarian (this researcher) also offers a program using the state’s children’s choice award books, the Golden Sowers. The program is completely optional and requires the students to read at least four of that year’s 10 nominees in order to attend a party at the end of the year and receive a medal. Students in the High Ability class are also encouraged to participate in a program called Battle of the Books, a state-wide trivia competition based on a set list of books for each grade level. Only fourth and fifth grade students participate in the program and about half of the books on the fourth grade list overlap with Golden Sower selections.

The students in the study were in fourth and fifth grade and had attended the school for a year and a half. There were 13 students in the High Ability Learner (HAL) program at the time of the study with five students in the fourth grade and eight in fifth. There were five boys and six girls involved in the study and all were Caucasian.
Each individual student was interviewed for approximately 10-15 minutes after a 30-40 minute library class. Summaries for individual participants follow.

**Student 41**

Student 41 was a 10-year-old female in 4th grade. She enjoyed reading fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, and nonnarrative nonfiction. She stated, “My mom and dad help me a lot.” She also said, “I love teaching my little brother to read.” She also stated that she would probably read some books because of her sister, “And I maybe will read graphic novels. Probably because I mean my sister enjoys them.” Her family had a large influence on what she read and why she liked to read certain materials. She enjoyed teaching her younger siblings to read. She read eBooks on a Kindle occasionally and used that to help her find books that were challenging or “in her reading level”. She worried about finishing long books “in time” before they were due to be returned to the library. She did use libraries to check out books, but did not usually purchase books from book orders. She had access to a great number of reading materials at home. She read what she considered to be “a lot” - an hour and a half almost every day she said, even though her and her siblings’ activities impacted her time spent reading for fun. “I’d like to have a little bit more of like reading time since I have a lot going on,” she said. She had a subscription to the mostly nonfiction magazine *National Geographic Kids* and she enjoyed reading the comics in the newspaper. She sometimes picked up books she saw others reading, but mostly relied on her own decision making skills to choose if she should read a book or not. She stated, “I start just like reading books and then I can tell if it’s a good book and then I search for the genre of the book.” She did not elaborate on the Accelerated Reader program too greatly, but enjoyed the books she read for Battle of
the Books. The books she highlighted spanned a large variety of genres. There were several she chose just for pure enjoyment, like cookbooks and poetry. There were a few that she checked out due to her sister’s influence (reading with her or because her sister checked it out too). She expressed quite a bit of enthusiasm for the Lemony Snicket book, *Who Could that Be at This Hour*, saying, “I really liked this one. I love Lemony Snicket.” This fits with her fantasy/science fiction leanings. Though she did not dwell on book difficulty, she did state that finding books that are hard enough can be a barrier. “It’s kind of hard to find my level, so sometimes I have to get as close as I can,” she said. She followed up by explaining what she thinks when she sees the books located in the higher reading level areas in the school library. “They’re in my level, but it kind of looks like they’re really huge and I wouldn’t have time to finish them.” Like other students, she wasn’t sure if some popular books, in this case *Harry Potter*, were in the school library.

**Student 43**

One of three boys at the fourth grade level, this student also said that he likes fantasy. He did mention other genres later in the interview, like the popular realistic fiction series *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* because “he’s [the main character] just a normal kid”. He reads before he goes to bed and at school. By his standards, he reads “a lot”, though he did not quantify what that meant. This student said he uses AR levels to pick books, but stuck to a strict definition of reading for fun when highlighting books on his circulation record. “I read some books for fun and for AR, but more for AR, so those I didn’t highlight,” he said. He also mentioned that he enjoyed the historical fiction series *I Survived*, but stated that it “wasn’t worth a lot of AR points”. Occasionally, his friends
give him suggestions on what to read and he checks books out at both the school and public libraries. Purchasing books at book fairs and from book orders was another way that he obtained books for fun. Though he does get suggestions on what to read from his friends, he mostly relies on himself to find books he wants to read. “I just picked them,” he said.

**Student 44**

Student 44 was another 10-year-old male in fourth grade. He also liked fantasy and the *Harry Potter* series, as well as adventure books. He discovered the series because he was concerned with meeting his AR points goal, but also revealed that he ended up really enjoying some of the books he read for AR. This created a quandary for him of whether or not to highlight those particular books as ones he read for fun. “I read this one so that I could meet my AR goal, but I wanted to read it. So I don't know if I should highlight it or not,” he said. He mentioned several other books that were read for assigned reading, like High Ability class, the Golden Sowers, and Battle of the Books, that he ended up liking as well. For example, for one Golden Sower book he highlighted he said, “I did it for the points, but I really liked it, and I just kept reading it, and reading it.” There were also several books he mentioned were for assignments that he didn’t enjoy or didn’t finish. He did not state in minutes how much he reads per day, but did state that he doesn’t want to read any more than he does now. He does read in bed and will occasionally read other times as well. “Sometimes when I'm just bored, I'll read, just for the heck of it,” he said. Friends influence his decisions to read books, but ultimately, he decides if he should read them. While his brother gets him access to one series, he mostly uses the school library and occasionally buys books from the book fair. Like
many other students interviewed, he enjoyed nonnarrative nonfiction books, like *Would You Rather, Just Joking*, and *Weird but True*. He also receives *National Geographic Kids* magazine that his grandma purchased for him, which happens to be the publisher for several of those nonnarrative nonfiction books on his list. *The Hobbit* was an assignment for the High Ability class and he didn’t finish it. However, *Loot*, the Golden Sower he enjoyed, encouraged him to even pick up the sequel. Like other students, he named several books that he thought the school library didn’t have that were actually a part of the library’s collection. He had a specific thought on assigned reading, even though it came into conflict with some of his previous statements. “Assignments are not fun,” he said. With regards to the difficulty level of books he stated that, “I don't really care about what books fit me. I don't do the Five-Finger Rule or the level.” However, he also followed that up with, “I don't do below my level unless I already met my [AR goal]”.

Like almost every other student interviewed, he also said that he just walks around the library and looking at books in order to find what he wants to read. He doesn’t receive any help…it’s “just him”.

**Student 45**

The last fourth grader was also a 10-year-old male. Once again, he liked to read fantasy for fun, but he also mentioned sports books later. He reads nonfiction every once in a while, and occasionally reads eBooks. When asked how much time he spends reading, he said that he has “to read a least a half an hour every day”. He would like to read a little more, but sports practice and activities get in the way. Reflecting the trend of the interviews, he primarily finds books by looking around on his own. “They’re just books I kinda found.” Sometimes his sister or friends suggest books to him. His family
does not order books through the book orders because he stated that, “My mom says I can just either get it from the library or we can just get it on a Kindle or something.” He uses both school and public libraries and gets Kindle books through the public library. His mom “once” gave him a good book to read and his grandpa will get math practice books for him so that he can learn more difficult concepts in math. That's sometimes, probably the only time I actually buy books,” he said. Most of what he highlighted as books he read for fun were from the previous school year because they “didn’t have AR goals” that year. The researcher followed this statement up with a question, “So if they are AR books, then they're not necessarily for fun?” To which the student replied, “No. I'm just trying to get AR points. Like this was just the last book, that I needed a couple points, like a point, a point. So, and this was a point, and they're just kinda quick books that are actually in my AR level.” AR continued to be a theme for him when he mentioned he would like to read more sports, but they are not in his AR level, so that stops him from reading them. “It stops me there,” he reiterated. When looking for books that interest him that are also hard enough he stated that it was, “Just me looking at levels.”

**Student 51**

Student 51 was an 11-year-old male in 5th grade. He liked reading fantasy books as well, but also enjoyed realistic fiction books. He specifically mentioned the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, but said that he “prefers more advanced books”. He used to receive a subscription to *National Geographic Kids* magazine too, as well as the *Lego Club* magazine. He said that he reads a “few hours a day”, but would like to read more in order to learn all he can. He has several people who influence his book selections, but also relies on his own decision-making skills before choosing a book. He said, “Well, I
think when someone recommends it to me, I'll check it out and if I like it, then, I'll read it.” The researcher asked him to clarify who he meant by “someone”. He responded with, “My friends, my family, teachers.” He does order books from book orders, as well as checking them out from both public and school libraries. They also have “a ton” of reading materials at home. Student 51 also stuck with a rigid definition of reading for fun and didn’t highlight books that he read for the Golden Sower program or other assignments. “Well, I didn't read them for fun because they were assigned to me or they were for the Golden Sower thing last year,” he said. When finding books to read, he mostly finds them himself by looking around. He enjoys the action, adventure, and imagination in many fantasy books. “I like how they make you feel like you're somewhere else.”

**Student 52**

Student 52 was a 10-year-old fifth grade girl. This student and her mother have twice previously sought help from the school librarian (also the researcher) trying to find books that were enough that she also would enjoy. She enjoys fantasy and adventure, though she also mentioned several historical fiction titles she really enjoyed. According to her, she reads “all the time”. She has an hour and fifteen minute bus ride that she typically fills by reading books. Friends tell her about books to read, but so do parents, teachers, and the school librarian/researcher. After specifically mentioning one friend who recommends books to her and being prompted by the research to state any other influences she said, “Sometimes my parents, and Mrs. Jones [a previous teacher], and you.” She considers books in book orders to not be very challenging. She said, “They're not usually very hard to read.” She gets books from both the school and public libraries
and she sometimes get them as presents, but she stated, “I only read them once, so they usually don't do that.” She was able to find books to check out at the libraries that she considered hard enough, even going so far as to state that “lots of them” were hard enough. She included several titles from the Battle of the Books program, Golden Sower program, and other class assignments in her highlighting as books she read for fun.

“She highlighted some of them that I highlighted, I read for Battle of the Books partly, but they were really good books that I had fun reading,” she said. She didn’t highlight ones that she didn’t find interesting and abandoned. When looking for books, she reiterated the theme that no one helps her. “I just kind of pick out random books sometimes,” she said. She had been encouraged to read more classics as a way to find more challenging books and referenced Pollyanna and Black Beauty, classics that she didn’t think were in the school library, but actually are. Student 52 said she wants to challenge herself to read more difficult books for fun. “It's sort of not as fun when it's not challenging because you wanna learn new things and I want to always learn new things when I'm reading. And when it's too easy, it's just not that fun.” Despite being given lists previously of “challenging” books in genres she likes, she still quite often picks books out randomly and she doesn’t feel that she will always find good choices. “It's luck-of-the-draw,” she said.

**Student 53**

Another 11-year-old fifth grade female, Student 53 liked fantasy, National Geographic Kids, history, and biographies. She occasionally reads eBooks and occasionally picks up her brother’s copy of Boy’s Life magazine. Once in a while, she will also read the newspaper. Student 53 reads about an hour a night unless activities and
other homework get in the way. She said, “I read for an hour every night of a new book I’m reading, normally an hour, unless I don't have time. And it really depends on if I'm busy or not, and I have the time to read.” She mostly decides herself what to read, but sometimes friends recommend books to her. “I read the back of the book, and if it sounds interesting, then I'll read the first two chapters, and if I don't like it, then I won't read it. But if I do like it, then I'll keep reading it until the end,” she said. She does not order from books orders and gets her books from both the school and public libraries, as well as getting books for gifts and occasionally borrowing from friends. She says that books read for her AR points/goal are not for fun. For example, in reference to one book she said that she “did not like that” and followed up with, “I read it because it was non-fiction, and I needed that to meet my AR goal.” She will ask her friends what they are reading because most of them are “the same level” as her, then she will then go to that AR level in the library to find books. In addition to the High Ability teacher, she also mentioned her homeroom teacher as an influence. “Mrs. Roberts said something about [this book]. She said she really liked it, so I read that one for fun.” Though she suggested the library get a series called Fablehaven, it is another series that the school library does already have.

**Student 54**

Student 54 was another 11-year-old female in fifth grade who liked to read fantasy and adventure. She also reads mysteries, *National Geographic Kids*, and *American Girl Dolls* magazine. She says she reads when she has any time at all to read. “I just grab a book 'cause I really like reading.” Her older sister and friends influence what she selects to read, but she finds out about books many different ways, “A mix of all
of them, kind of,” she said. The school and public library both are places that she checks out books and she says they have a large selection at home. She does not buy from book orders, but they do get books at book fairs and Barnes & Noble. There were some books that she didn’t remember or didn’t remember why she read them. She said that some Golden Sower books were “just Golden Sowers” [to do the awards program]. They turned out to be good, but she didn’t consider it that she picked them up for fun. “And then some of the non-fiction books. Non-fiction books are my favorite, but sometimes we have to read them for class for AR and stuff….They were actually really good, but…”, she trailed off. The researcher confirmed with her, “But they weren’t necessarily something you picked up for fun?” The student agreed. She focused on fantasy books with fairy-tale characters and stated that, “They have an interesting storyline, and you can just feel yourself in that moment.” She gave another example about almost crying because a main character was dying. They make her feel things the researcher observed and the student agreed. She really likes series books. She explained, ‘I read a lot of series books because they just keep going and going. I'm like, "Oh, yay, here's another book!"’. Due to the fact that this student was the first interview, she was not asked about how or where she finds books that are “hard enough”. That question was added in subsequent interviews.

**Student 56**

Student 56 was a 10-year old female in 5th grade. The week prior to the interview, this student approached the school librarian (the researcher) for book recommendations based on a suggestion from the classroom teacher. She enjoys fantasy, science fiction, realistic fiction, adventure, and mystery. Though she reads many paper
books, she doesn’t read in many other formats. She reads 30-60 minutes a day. When picking out a book, she typically reads back of book and picks out a book herself, but sometimes friends, teachers, the HAL teacher, and her brother recommend things to her. During the previous work with the student and during this interview, her mom was also mentioned as having a big impact on deciding what is appropriate for her to read. She stated, “My mom will look for [books] online but she doesn't get them online. She just looks for books online.” She did not include the school librarian in her list of people who recommend books, though she mentioned later that the last three books she read for fun were suggested by the school librarian. “And then you recommended these three,” she explained about the last three highlighted books. “And you ended up enjoying them?” the researcher asked. “Yeah,” the student replied. She checks books out from both the school and public libraries and once in a while goes to Barnes & Noble, they do not order from book orders. She didn’t highlight books on her circulation record that bored her or that she didn’t finish. She also didn’t highlight several Golden Sower books. She mentioned that she loved the Chronicles of Narnia series and then followed it up with an observation on the next books on the list. “I don't know what happened here. I just started checking out a lot of horror books for no apparent reason. Probably because my friends were checking a lot out.” She did mention enjoying the book The Greenglass House because “it has a lot of genres kind of mixed into it”. She also looks in the higher AR section to find books that are hard enough. No one really helps her actually find books. Like many other students, she enjoys series books. She was the first to mentioned a series the school library only had the first one of, a fantasy series called Mismantle.
Student 57

Student 57 was an eleven-year-old fifth grade male. After the interview, the school librarian (the researcher) was approached by the mother asking for further assistance in finding books that would appeal to the student. Student 57’s interview and data contrasted with many of his peers. His favorite genre was sports. Sometimes, he also reads horror and comedies. He reads *Sports Illustrated Kids* magazine and says he reads “quite a bit”, though he stated, “I probably want to read more.” His friends influence his books selection, but he will also pick up a book if it’s an author he’s experienced before or if he sees it in a book order or a Golden Sower. “Well, if my friends tell me it's good, I usually listen to them. And if I've read the author before and I thought they were good, I like that,” he said. He does purchase books at Barnes & Noble and strives for difficult books there. He stated, “I always try to pick something out that I want to read in the teen section, so I set like a goal for myself.” He sometimes attends the public library in the summer. He added, “And I CAN go here [the school library], but I always have two or three [books] from the book order.” The emphasis here indicated that though he can check books out from the school library, he typically does not. His circulation records reflect this as there was only one book checked out for the entire school year. From previous school years, he didn’t highlight books that he didn’t finish and some he didn’t remember. One book he stated that he read just because they were going to go on vacation there. He highlighted to the book *Heroes of 9/11* saying, “I liked reading about what happened.” He also suggested adding books to the school library that were already in the collection, but he ultimately said he enjoyed reading. “It’s fun. I like it.”
Student 58

New to the district in fifth grade, Student 58 was an 11-year-old female who consistently liked horror and mystery books. “A lot of them I enjoyed because they were just really a lot of events, like crazy events, like in horror, maybe someone dying or something, and then they recover or something,” she explained. She wanted to get set up to read eBooks, but wasn’t able to yet. She doesn’t read magazines, but says she “probably” reads books about an hour a day. She would like to read more often, but activities take up a lot of her time. “I have a lot of things going on at home,” she said. When she is trying to find a book to read she relies mostly on herself to find books that interest her. “I really just look and then I go and open up a page and just look through the first page and see if it's something I like.” She says that no one gives her suggestions on what to read, except for once when her mom suggested a book. When asked if specific people influence her reading choices, she replied, “Not really” to each group named. She does get books occasionally for presents. Student 58 gets books at the public and school libraries, though getting them from the public library has been difficult since moving to the research location, a smaller town, and away from the grandma that took them to the metropolitan city’s large public library system. “My grandma used to take us to the Mason Public Library, but not as much anymore,” she said. When she lived in the city, they would also go to the bookstore once in a while, but they do not go as often anymore since moving away. The books on her list she didn’t highlight as books for fun were ones that were for AR. For example, she singled out a nonfiction book on hamsters that she didn’t highlight and said, “We have to read non-fiction.” Some of the books though that were highlighted ended up being for AR as well, but she stated that AR wasn’t the main
reason she picked those. “I just read them and then I decided since I did read them, I might as well just take the AR test.” Gaining AR points on them was a bonus to reading good books. Despite not highlighting the nonfiction book because it was an assignment, she did state that she does like reading about history and historical fiction. She said that she found the I Survived series on her own at her previous school’s library, when she was just looking around. “I was just looking around in the historic fiction and I saw this new series,” she said. Like many of the other students, she also enjoyed reading series books. “If it was in a series, I would go back and read the rest of the series normally,” she said.
Chapter 4 Research Findings

The research question guiding this study was what are the factors that impact gifted students’ recreational reading selections? The additional sub questions examined were: 1. How do parents, friends, teachers, librarians, and other outside sources influence the recreational reading choices of gifted students? 2. What types of materials and in what formats do gifted students like to read recreationally? 3. Do gifted students select different independent reading materials in different locations (school vs. home vs. the public library for example)? 4. What other influences impact gifted students reading selections? Through the use of personal interviews, 11 students shared their experiences with recreational reading. Data from school library circulations and the independent reading management program were also used to inform the results.

The answers to the research question and subquestions followed a simple Five Ws format. They also reflected the key elements of The Theory of Reasoned Action. The subquestions were answered by determining the following:

1) Who – The important others that impacted the students’ reading selections

2) What – The genres and formats that the students believed they would be able to find and enjoy

3) Where/How – The places the students believed they would be able to find materials to read for recreation and how often they obtained them

4) When – When the students knew they would have time to read recreationally

5) Why – The underlying motivations for why the students chose to read certain materials whether for recreation or assigned reading
**Question 1: Who Impacts Recreational Reading Selections?**

Half of the key components of The Theory of Reasoned Action involve what people perceive important others believe about their actions. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), “Generally speaking, a person who believes that most referents with whom he is motivated to comply think he should perform the behavior will perceive social pressure to do so” (p. 7). The referents that motivated most students were their peers. The peer influence code appeared 23 times in the interview analysis, more than double any other outside influence. If this particular group, similar in age and experiences, recommended materials to the student to read for enjoyment, the student was more likely to comply and select those materials. Though adults were mentioned as potential other referents, the students did not seem as motivated to select those recommendations. If students perceived that their peers thought they should read a book, the students were more likely to pick that book as a recreational reading choice. This finding reinforces what previous studies have found regarding children’s selection of reading materials (Adler, Rougle, Kaiser, & Caughlan, 2004; Allington, 2002; Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 1997; Conniff, 1993; Gambrell & Almasi, 1996; Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer, 1996; Kasten, Kristo, & McClure, 2005; Larsen, 1999; Manning & Manning, 1984; Tate, 2014). Adults were mentioned as influences but with far less frequency than peers.

Despite the heavy influence of peers however, the students often relied on themselves to locate the books and make the final decision on what to read. The self-selection code appeared 27 times throughout the interviews. This demonstrates that the students place more value on their own behavioral beliefs. They make the decision if they will enjoy
the book (a positive outcome) or not enjoy the boy (a negative outcome). Harkening back to the theory, the student’s placed more weight on this side of the equation – their beliefs toward the behavior – which ultimately determined the student’s action of reading the book or not. This preference for autonomy in gifted students is not new. The independent learning model has been widely used in gifted education for years and demonstrated as a preferred method of learning by gifted students, though the process has taken many forms. Johnsen and Goree (2005) even ventured to call it the most frequently recommended instructional strategy for gifted students (p. 379). The model has evolved over the years from George Betts’s (1985) original Autonomous Learner Model to many variations by other researchers and an updated model by Betts (1999) years later. Yet a critical component of the latest independent learning models appears to be lacking when it comes to recreational reading for gifted students – teacher guidance. In fact, Johnsen and Goree (2005, p. 387) even state that teacher guidance is “critical” when it comes to independent learning being a success. The question then becomes, why is teacher guidance lacking when it comes to guiding recreational reading choices? For what may be a myriad of reasons, there appears to be a lack of communication regarding recreational reading with these high ability readers. Their selections tend to be what Student 52 calls “the luck of the draw”. Though many adults seem to provide some recommendations, the physical act of actually locating and choosing books appears to be a solitary activity for the students. Even with the collected knowledge available on the Autonomous Learner Model, Johnsen and Goree (2005) say it can be one of the most “abused” strategies. In the attempt to develop critical, independent thinkers, and cater to the preference of working independently, students are often left with limited instruction
and support. It appears that even in the world of recreational reading there needs to be a balance between independence and guidance. There are some examples in this study of students following through on teacher and school librarian recommendations, but those were all preceded by specific discussions with the student on what selections the student may enjoy reading. Most of the students, 9 out of 11, in the study did not have these conversations with teachers or the school librarian. This could be an area where changes could be made in order to have a greater impact on the recreational reading habits of gifted students.

The next four questions all fit the behavioral beliefs side of the Theory of Reasoned Action. This is the side that students ultimately gave more weight to when decided to what to read for recreation. The students base their decision on what to read on the perceived positive outcomes of particular books. For example, they may think, “I will enjoy that genre of book. I will find a book I like at the school library. I will learn something if I read this book or I will simply enjoy it. I will meet a goal or earn something by reading this book.” The students’ attitudes toward the behavior of reading a certain book weighs heavily on if they actually intend to read it.

**Question 2: What Types of Materials Do Students Choose for Recreational Reading?**

What gifted students like to read for recreation was overwhelmingly clear in this research study. They prefer fantasy books in paper format quite often in a series. The code for fantasy genre was the most frequently used code, appearing 43 times over the course of the interviews. Nine out of the eleven students mentioned fantasy as a favorite genre. This reflects the research on the topic in roughly the last twenty years (Brown &
St. Claire, 2002; Cavazos-Kottke, 2006; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Larsen, 1999; Robinson, 1997; Stutler, 2011a). The questions as to why the students enjoy this particular genre are not as readily studied, but there are some researchers that offer a few theories. Halstead believes that intermediate and middle-school aged students identify with the elements in fantasy and science fiction stories because it mirrors their own development. “They discover it at just the age when they are entering their own personal quests for identity and beginning to consciously to establish their personal values” (Halstead, 2009, p. 218). She states that fantasy and science fiction “must be exactly what they need in the late elementary and middle school years” (Halstead, 2009, p. 218.) They also might identify with both the dystopian/chaotic scenarios in many science fiction novels and the uniqueness of characters that have special abilities. Stutler draws parallels to Dabrowski’s Theory of Overexcitabilities, which proposes that gifted students experience the world with heightened levels - intellectually, emotionally, and even imaginatively. She spoke specifically to why the complexity of the science fiction genre might hold appeal for gifted students, but the comparison holds true for fantasy as well. (In fact, many libraries and bookstores keep the two genres together.) Stutler (2011a) suggests that one appeal of the genre is the deep and complex content involved. The characters:

Are very likely to be involved in difficult journeys of self-discovery and self-determination as they embark on quests for friendship, freedom, or survival. Moral dilemmas and choices abound as characters battle mind control, plan and build new worlds, and come to a deeper understanding of themselves and others. (p. 46)
They also contain wildly descriptive settings and worlds that stretch the imagination of the reader. The *Harry Potter* series, for example, was mentioned often during this study. Many researchers have proposed that the reason these particular novels are so popular are because the characters reflect the struggles the readers feel in their own lives. McTaggert (2011) says:

Rowling’s characters challenge authority, test their own trials and tribulations, and allow the reader to be captivated by the growth of the character’s identity as they make life-changing decisions and ultimately grow to be independent, strong-willed individuals who impact the world in which they live. (p. 2-3)

In this study, some of the reasons the students gave for liking the fantasy genre were the imagination in it and the way they make you feel like you are somewhere else. As the school librarian in the research location for the past 13 years, the researcher has cultivated a diverse collection of fantasy and science fiction books and those genres makes up approximately 32% of the fiction collection in the school library, giving students ready access to those genres.

Another popular selection for gifted students’ recreational reading is what the researcher categorized as nonnarrative nonfiction. This code appeared 14 times and in six of the eleven interviews. Examples of this genre would include *Weird but True* books from *National Geographic Kids*, *The Guinness Book of World Records*, and *Ripley’s Believe it or Not*. Though the reasoning behind these choices have not been studied, they do seem to tie in to both their magazine reading preferences (many students received and read the magazine *National Geographic Kids*) and their desire to read in order to learn. These books are formatted to include lots of facts and information in quick, easily
digestible bites, which would make it appealing to younger readers looking to learn new information.

There seems to be a divide in the students regarding an emphasis on book difficulty. Many students, eight of the eleven, mentioned looking for books “in their level” to select as if it were a helpful thing. Some were even adamant that a book needs to be challenging enough to be fun. However, one specifically mentioned not caring if the books were in his level or not – though that was mostly after meeting his AR goal for class. AR actually has three measures of difficulty, but the students seem to mostly rely on level and points/length. They seem to not be aware of the interest level measure and how that factors in to their choices as none of the students mentioned this measure. More of this discussion will fall later in the “Why” section as the independent reading program became a major discussion point with regards to why something was not considered “fun”. However, the students don’t seem to be opposed to selecting books at a certain difficulty level, at least some of the time. They just seem to prefer to not be forced – however loosely that force seems to be applied - to read that way.

Often, students seemed to be unaware of the books available in the school library. Six out of the eleven students mentioned books or series that they were unaware the school library had in its collection. It is unclear why this is. It could be because they simply find a book elsewhere and stop looking for it in the school library. As Student 53 says, “If I do find it, I never check to see if they have it here”. It could also be because the size of the library collection making it difficult to browse and find things or it could be the lack of time for the students to come to the library during the school day. This issue was not addressed in this research study, but could be a point of further exploration.
Because students also have other sources they get books from (the study shows they also use the public library, get books from home, and occasionally purchase books), does this correlate to low circulation rates at the school library for the current year compared to the previous year? The data on the students’ library circulations shows 162 unique check outs for this school year, as opposed to 338 the previous year, even accounting for the remaining three months of the school year would not make up that gap. It does appear that having contact with the librarian improve library circulation as the two students who received individual recommendations from the librarian both highlighted several books that the librarian recommended that they both checked out and considered to be “fun”. There are many areas to explore in this particular portion of the question.

**Question 3: Where and How Often Do the Students Obtain Recreational Reading Materials?**

There were many similarities between the previous question and this one. All of the students except one stated they get them from the school library. Yet, as previously cited, the circulation records for the current year don’t seem to reflect that. There was a large drop in circulation statistics from last year to this year – even factoring in the new fifth grade student who checked out a large number of books. The one student who did not directly state that he gets books at the school library, emphasized that he CAN get books there, but typically has books from other sources. That student only had one book checked out the entire school year. However, both this student’s classroom teacher and a parent approached the school librarian with concerns about his reading habits after the study interview. A question remains on if or how increasing circulations from the school library would impact recreational reading.
Students also get recreational reading materials from many other sources. All but one use the public library and at least three get books from home. Sometimes books are purchased from stores or book fairs, especially for special events. Though distance from the closest bookstore makes heading to one an infrequent occasion. The student who moved into the district came from the nearby metropolitan area mentioned both the public library there and going to bookstores. Now that they have moved away from those – and the grandma that took them – it is harder for her to get books elsewhere. Book orders by and large, were not greatly used. The reasons seem to center on two factors. First, parents often express that the students can get these books from the library instead of having to pay for them. When a student is voracious reader, keeping up with their habits by purchasing books could potentially get expensive. Student 45 said, “My mom says I can just either get it from the library or we can just get it on a Kindle or something.” Another concern was the difficulty level of the material in the book orders. Student 53 also stated that, “[The books] aren’t usually very hard to read.” The main exception to this was the student who also had very low school library circulation rates. Ultimately, it appears from the interviews that libraries have the greatest potential influence in this area, but the circulation data doesn’t match up with what was stated in the interviews. This dichotomy needs to be explored further.

**Question 4: When Do the Students Read Recreationally?**

The question of when students read for fun did not have a surprising answer. Most students read for fun at home. The location code for reading at home appeared eight times versus the once for at school and twice for in the car or at activities. The students read at home before or after school or even before bed. Four students mentioned
activities as affecting their ability to have time to read and at least two mentioned reading while in the car to activities or waiting at a sibling’s activity. Living roughly 30 minutes away from the main urban area gave travel time to some, but other local activities also impacted their recreational reading time. While no students said they would want to read less than they do now, they were evenly split about where they would like to read more or about the same. There was no difference in this for grade level as fourth and fifth each split on this point as well. The glaring omission here is that no students stated that they read for fun at school. Given the education environment today, that fact is not exactly surprising. Studies have shown that free reading time in schools has been decreasing (Scholastic, 2015, p. 47).

**Question 5: Why (and Why Not) Do the Students Choose What They Read for Recreation?**

One of the most important details to emerge from the interviews was why students said they read something for fun. There were two aspects to this conversation. The first was the students’ basic motivation behind reading. These were simple to understand reasons. They read because they liked it and they read because they wanted to learn new things. Student 52 said, “I always want to read new things when I’m reading.”

The other aspect was more complex and that was regarding assigned reading. There was a dichotomy in the students’ views on this topic. Many, eight out of the eleven felt that assigned reading, especially books read to meet their AR goal, were not considered “fun”. Golden Sowers and Battle of the Books, both programs that are voluntary, were also not typically considered recreational. However, several students,
four of the eleven, elaborated that they found they ended up enjoying books that were assigned reading. The impact of AR on recreational reading was much more prevalent in fourth grade. The fourth graders interviewed were significantly more likely to identify it as being a hindrance to reading for fun. Fourth graders mentioned AR as a hindrance to recreational reading almost six times more than fifth graders. While most of the students identified AR as being a help to find books in “their level”, five stated that they wanted to read materials that were outside of that level for fun, but could not because of the AR goals they had. But to some, the AR test was secondary to the fact that they read them for fun. What affects this perspective? Does teacher rigidity to the program impact it or is it simply personality? While several fifth graders highlighted books that they read for fun that they also took tests on, this occurred far less in the fourth grade. All four fourth graders (100%) had book level goals and all were even restricted from taking tests on lower level books. Far less fifth graders (57%) had book level goals and none of the teachers in that grade level restricted quizzes based on book level. Does teacher emphasis on level affect the student viewpoint about AR books also being fun?

Another concerning trend to emerge from examining this portion of the data was that males had significantly lower point goals than girls. The males in the study had points goals that were roughly 50% lower than that of most of their female counterparts. The library circulation data on males versus females also reflects this (44 titles versus 118), as does the number books the students said they read for fun (15 titles versus 88). This echoes a common theme in reading research that boys don’t read as much as their female peers (Hall & Coles, 1999; Hopper, 2005; Maynard, MacKay, & Smyth, 2008;
Pitcher, et al., 2007; Simpson, 1996). Despite this being a well-known fact, to see this trend reflected in gifted students is a concern that must be examined further.

**Conclusion**

Gifted students reflect the reading habits of the general reading population in many ways. They rely heavily on peer and sibling recommendations to find books that they would enjoy reading recreationally. However, they are quite often left to locate and select these books independently without guidance from teachers, leaving the chance of success in finding enjoyable reading materials up in the air. Many gifted students like to read the fantasy genre, as well as nonnarrative nonfiction, and they typically love to read books in a series. However, the students have mixed feelings regarding books in a certain difficulty level. While they like being able to find books at a more challenging level, many disliked being required to only read in that level. Additionally, the students often seem unaware of the availability of books in the school library. This is an issue that should be addressed in more detail as the students cite the school library as the primary place where they obtain recreational reading materials. The data do not reflect this statement however as the students appear to have low circulation rates. This dichotomy needs to be examined further as well. The role of assigned/encouraged reading programs, how those programs are implemented, and their impact on recreational reading is another common issue among these gifted readers. Lastly, as research has shown, the male gifted readers seem to lag behind their female counterparts in terms of reading volume both recreationally and for assigned/encouraged reading programs. Clearly, some of our brightest students have more issues regarding their reading habits than most realize.
Chapter 5 Discussion

While several discussion points emerged during the course of this study, there are three that take precedent over the others and provide implications for both practice and policy, as well as future research. They are: 1) The role and relationships of the school librarian in the pursuit of recreational reading for gifted students, 2) How assigned, and even highly encouraged, reading impacts the recreational reading habits of successful readers, and 3) Gifted boys’ motivation to read.

The Role of the School Librarian in Gifted Students Recreational Reading

The students in this study overwhelmingly preferred to obtain materials for recreational reading from the school library, but the data the researcher collected do not reflect this claim. The question arises, why don’t these two findings match? This is an area that needs to be investigated further if school libraries are to provide the quality service that these students deserve. Suggestions for further research in this area are for a researcher that is not the school librarian to survey students regarding their opinions on and use of the school library. How often are they successful at obtaining materials they are interested in at the school library? When do they like to use the school library and are they satisfied with the amount of time and attention they receive. Is this a phenomenon specific to this research location? Gifted students deserve to have both time and access to materials that they enjoy in the school library. Research has showed us that much attention has been paid to other diverse groups of students and what they need in reading materials. We must devote the same effort to gifted students and attempt to ensure they feel at home obtaining these materials at the school library. A study that is quantitative might help more clearly define the connection between the statements of preference by
these gifted students and the actions actually carried out. With a more definitive answer in hand, school librarians could take concrete steps to ensure that our insatiable readers are included, welcomed, and actually utilizing the school library for recreational reading.

The study results also suggest that the school librarian should take time to cultivate an individual relationship with gifted students. This portion of the research findings is a call to action for school librarians. The two students in the study that received specific assistance from the school librarian on available books that they might prefer, checked out and then selected those books as ones they considered enjoyable. It is clear that a librarian who takes the time to talk to a student in-depth and develop personalized reading choices can impact the level of enjoyment of recreational reading for these students. School librarians typically take a class when obtaining their endorsement on how to build a quality collection for their library. However, reader’s advisory, assisting specific patrons in finding those materials they might enjoy, is also an important tool at the librarian’s disposal. This is a tool that must be utilized more frequently by the school with gifted students. Often times, the students in this study were not aware of appealing items in the library’s collection. The librarian can help guide the students to these materials and increase their recreational reading opportunities. Building a relationship with gifted students, one where they feel comfortable enough to abandon the isolation they experience when checking out books and explain what they like, is a practice that school librarians must employ. We must get to know our gifted readers and assist them as we would our struggling readers. As Albus Dumbledore said in an oft-mentioned series in this study, “It is our choices Harry that show who we truly are, rather than our abilities” (Rowling, 1999, p. 333). Regardless of the level of achievement, personal
choice in independent reading leads to success. The school librarian can use this aspect as leverage to boost student success. The school librarian can also support the parents and teachers of gifted readers in providing recreational reading materials. Thousands of children’s books are published each year. In 2009, there were well over 21,000 books published (Barr & Harbison, 2010). It is the librarian who is the expert on these materials and can assist the classroom teacher in finding books that help motivate even our most voracious readers. Gifted readers could also benefit from changes in policy and practice that would allow them to obtain books easily from other institutions. At the research location, the school librarian/researcher has worked with middle school and public libraries in order to broaden the materials available to the students. After attending a field trip to both libraries and getting assistance in obtaining public library cards and setting up any electronic devices to use the eBook service from the public library, students are encouraged to explore and check out books from three libraries. Not only are they allowed to check out books from a library they wouldn’t normally have access to, but they also receive access to more mature materials and delivery of the books to and from. This type of change in policy and practice could alleviate some of the issues that Student 58 alluded to when they moved to a smaller town limiting her access to other books, as well as the grandma who assisted. The school librarian can and should become a facilitator to obtain materials when they aren’t available at the school library.

Undoubtedly, there are many ways in which the school librarian can strengthen his or her role in the reading lives of gifted students.
The Impact of Assigned Reading on Recreational Reading Habits

A second area that could benefit from more research is the role of assigned or encouraged reading in the recreational reading habits of students. Throughout the course of this study, students referred to the Accelerated Reader program, the Golden Sower program, and the Battle of the Books competition and often considered those books to not be “fun”. Teacher implementation of those programs might impact student viewpoints. Best practices and policies regarding the use of “required reading” programs must be thoroughly examined, especially in regard to high achieving students. When multiple assessments already show that the student can read a high level, we must ask ourselves what is the benefit of restricting recreational reading materials for them? And if there is a benefit, does it outweigh the impact the program has on the student’s ability to enjoy reading? Though it can be difficult to balance attempts to challenge students and broaden their reading selections with the important factor of choice, it is important to investigate the relationship between the two as this research shows that the program can have a negative impact on recreational reading. Though other studies on AR have focused on the general population of students, varying age groups, and even English as a Second Language and Learning Disabled students (Krashen, 2003; Mallette, Henk, & Melnick, 2004; McGlinn & Parrish, 2002; Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006; Paul, Vander Zee, Rue & Swanson, 1996), it is necessary for further research to be conducted that focuses on the impact of such programs on gifted students. These students should not continue to be left out of the research landscape, especially when it comes to reading.
Gifted Boys’ Motivation to Read

Finally, more attention needs to be paid to the reading habits of gifted boys. This study demonstrated that gifted boys tend to select recreational reading materials less often than girls. Though this has become an almost accepted notion in education, it cannot be ignored or glossed over. Just because they are “gifted” boys, does not mean they automatically read more. This is as much a cause for concern in the gifted population as it is in the general population. Additionally, the boys in this study also had lower teacher expectations and lower achievement of independent reading goals. Why is this occurring and how can have an impact in increasing reading expectations for gifted boys? The results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized to a broader population, therefore further research must investigate if this phenomenon holds true for gifted boys on a wider scale since it has for boys in general across the country.

Conclusion

Gifted students are a part of a diverse student population in schools today. While educators are faced with many tasks, engaging students in a life-long pursuit of reading is a primary goal for all grade levels. At the intermediate level, just prior to and at the start of the age where reading levels are shown to decline (Goodman, 1996; Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000; National Endowment for the Arts, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999, 2001; Tunnell, Calder, & Phaup, 1991), this becomes an important task. Gifted readers are often left to complete this task independently. Halstead says, “Books for children are plentiful, and most bright children are good readers who find them easily” (Halstead, 2009, p. 7). But as this study has demonstrated, the issue is not that simple. Gifted readers need to have a school librarian that takes time to cultivate
a relationship with them and provides them with ample opportunity to find what they want. They need teachers and parents willing to let them read the things that engage them recreationally. And gifted boys in particular need advocates that will help them grow as readers and not fall victim to the reading apathy that plagues boys in middle school. Though Halstead says books are plentiful, she also knows it’s not that simple. “Teachers struggling to meet basic requirements have little time to suggest and follow through with extra reading for brighter students. Parents may find it difficult to keep track of what their children are reading. Guiding children’s reading appears to be one more unaffordable luxury in an increasingly busy world” (Halstead, 2009, p. 7). Yet we must persist in providing these opportunities to all our students, not just the ones that we deem in more need of our attention. Our brightest students should not stagnate in their growth because we assume that “merely providing books”, as Halstead says, is enough. We must “fill in the gaps” and “bring gifted children and books together more effectively” (Halstead, 2009, p. 7). We simply cannot leave this to chance.
References


Goodman, K. (1996). *California, whole language and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).* (Fax Sheets on Whole Language No. 4). Tucson: University of Arizona, Department of Education.


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APPENDICIES

Appendix A
Letter of Consent
and a pseudonym in the actual dissertation.

Are there any benefits or drawbacks of being involved? This study might provide the students better access to materials and more opportunities to recreationally read materials of interest. It may also improve the reading experiences of other students. There are no real drawbacks to the participation as confidentiality will be maintained and the time it will take will be minimal.

Do they have to be in the study? No, they don't. I want all students to be comfortable talking with me about their reading choices, so they can certainly choose to not participate. They can also change their mind later if they decide they don't want to be in the study anymore.

Please read the enclosed consent form. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study, please sign and return one copy of the consent form. The other copy of the consent form is for your records.

Questions? You can ask questions at any time. My work telephone and e-mail are:

PH: 402-427-2815 E-mail: sara.churchill@blairsschools.org

In you have concerns about this research, you can also contact my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Rebecca Pasco, Ph.D. at UNO's College of Education:

PH: 402-554-2119 E-mail: rpasco@unomaha.edu

This study has been approved by Mr. Rex Pfeil, the superintendent of Blair Community Schools and Arbor Park principal Mr. Mike Janssen. They may also be contacted with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Sara Churchill
Email: sara.churchill@blairsschools.org
Phone: 402-427-2815

Title of this Research Study
LEFT TO CHANCE: GIFTED STUDENTS AND RECREATIONAL READING

Dear Parent,

In addition to being the librarian at Arbor Park, I am also a student in UNO’s Educational Leadership Doctorate Program. As part of this program, I will be conducting a research study to learn more about what kinds of materials gifted students like to read recreationally and why they select those materials. The process and results of this study will be the focus of my dissertation. Your child is invited to participate in this research study because your child is in 4th or 5th grade at Arbor Park and is in the High Ability Learner program.

Why I'm doing this study: Throughout my years as a librarian, I have noticed how difficult it can be to find materials for high readers at this age level. Materials that are a high level can contain content that may not be appropriate for intermediate age students. Occasionally, high readers can be frustrated that they aren't allowed to read what they truly want to read. And through it all, there is little conversation about this group of students and their reading opportunities. Because I believe that reading often and being deeply engaged in reading improves the quality of life for a person, I don't want gifted students to be overlooked in the area of reading. I am interested in how high readers select the materials they do and why they choose those materials so that we can provide better opportunities for them to read. Additionally, I hope that these results help inform our conversation of gifted readers and how we can meet their needs.

What will happen to your student if they participate in the study? If they participate in the study, they will be interviewed by me at school during normal school hours. The interview will be fairly short, consisting of four main questions with some follow up questions as necessary. I will also provide them with a list of the books they have checked out recently and ask them to tell me more about these choices. The interview should only take around a maximum of 30 minutes and will take place opposite of library specials time, so it should not impact instruction too greatly. The interview will be audio recorded only for accuracy, but all recordings and materials will be protected and confidential. In accordance with university guidelines, the audio recordings will be kept for three years and then mandatorily destroyed. The students' identities will be protected when the dissertation is written and no names will be used. The students' interviews will each receive a numeric code in the computerized files.
THE RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS
AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT

to be told everything you need to know about the research before you are asked to decide whether or not to take part in the research study. The research will be explained to you in a way that assures you understand enough to decide whether or not to take part.

to freely decide whether or not to take part in the research.

to decide not to be in the research, or to stop participating in the research at any time. This will not affect your medical care or your relationship with the investigator or the Nebraska Medical Center. Your doctor will still take care of you.

to ask questions about the research at any time. The investigator will answer your questions honestly and completely.

to know that your safety and welfare will always come first. The investigator will display the highest possible degree of skill and care throughout this research. Any risks or discomforts will be minimized as much as possible.

to privacy and confidentiality. The investigator will treat information about you carefully, and will respect your privacy.

... to keep all the legal rights you have now. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by taking part in this research study.

to be treated with dignity and respect at all times

The Institutional Review Board is responsible for assuring that your rights and welfare are protected. If you have any questions about your rights, contact the Institutional Review Board at (402) 559-6463.
Your child's research data will be used only for the purpose(s) described in the section "What is the reason for doing this research study?"

You are also allowing the research team to share your child's research data, as necessary, with other people or groups listed below:

- The UNMC Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- Institutional officials designated by the UNMC IRB
- Federal law requires that the subject's information may be shared with these groups:
  - The UNMC Institutional Review Board (IRB)
  - The HHS Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP)

You are authorizing us to use and disclose your child's research data for as long as the research study is being conducted.

You may cancel your authorization for further collection of your child's research data for use in this research at any time by contacting the principal investigator. However, the information which is included in the research data obtained to date may still be used. If you cancel this authorization, your child will no longer be able to participate in this research.

How will results of the research be made available to you during and after the study is finished?
In most cases, the results of the research can be made available to you when the study is completed, and all the results are analyzed by the investigator or the sponsor of the research. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but your child's identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you want the results of the study, contact the Principal Investigator at the phone number given at the end of this form or by writing to the Principal Investigator at the following address: 1717 Adams St., Blair, NE, 68008

What will happen if you decide not to give permission for your child to be in this research study?
You can decide not to give permission for your child to be in this research study. Deciding not to be in this research will not affect your child's relationship with the investigator or the Institution. Deciding not to be in this research will not affect your child's grades. Your child will not lose any benefits to which he/she is entitled.

There is a chance for loss of confidentiality.

What are the possible benefits to your child?
Your child is not expected to get any benefit from being in this research study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?
This study may provide a better understanding of the types of reading materials gifted students enjoy.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?
Instead of being in this research study, you can choose not to allow your child to participate.

What will allowing your child to be in this research study cost you?
There is no cost to you for your child to be in this research study.

Will you or your child be paid for being in this research study?
Neither you nor your child will be paid to be in this research study.

Who is paying for this research?
This research is being paid for by the University of Nebraska, Omaha, Educational Leadership Doctorate Program.

What should you do if your child is injured or has a medical problem during this research study?
Your child's welfare is the main concern of every member of the research team. If your child is injured or has a medical problem or some other kind of problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the end of this consent form.

How will information about your child be protected?
All necessary steps will be taken to protect the privacy and the confidentiality of your child's study data. Only research personnel will have access to your child's information. Additionally, your child's name will not be recorded. Instead, your child will be identified by a numeric code.

Who will have access to information about your child?
By signing this consent form, you are allowing the research team to have access to your child's research data. The research team includes the investigators listed on this consent form and other personnel involved in this specific study at the Institution.
whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that:
- You have read and understood this consent form.
- You have had the consent form explained to you.
- You have been given a copy of The Rights of Research Subjects
- You have had your questions answered.
- You have decided to permit your child to be in the research study. You have
decided to be in the research study.
- If you have any questions during the study, you have been directed to talk to
one of the investigators listed below on this consent form.
- You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Parent/Guardian ___________________________ Date __________

You are agreeing to be in this research study. You have had someone explain the
study to you, and answer your questions.

Signature ___________________________ of Subject:_________________________
Date:_________________________

My signature certifies that all the elements of informed consent described on this
consent form have been explained fully to the parent/guardian of the subject. In my
judgment, the parent/guardian subject possesses the legal capacity to give informed
consent for their child to participate in this research and is voluntarily and knowingly
giving informed consent to participate.

Signature of Person obtaining consent ___________________________ Date __________

Authorized Study Personnel
Principal
* Churchill, Sara
alt #: 402-427-2815
degree: M.A.

Faculty Advisor
Keiser, Kay
phone: 402-554-3443
alt #: 402-554-3443
degree: Ed.D.

What will happen if you decide to stop your child’s participation once it starts?
You can stop your child’s participation in this research (withdraw) at any time by
contacting the Principal Investigator or any of the research staff.

Deciding to withdraw will otherwise not affect your child’s care or relationship with the
investigator or this institution.

Your child will not lose any benefits to which he/she is entitled. Any research data
obtained to date may still be used in the research.

Will you be given any important information during the study?
You will be informed promptly if the research team gets any new information during
this research study that may affect whether you would want your child to continue
being in the study.

What should you do if you have any questions about the study?
You have been given a copy of “What Do I Need to Know Before Being in a
Research Study”? If you have any questions at any time about this study, you should
contact the Principal Investigator or any of the study personnel listed on this consent
form or any other documents that you have been given.

What are your child’s rights as a research subject?
Your child has rights as a research subject. These rights have been explained in this
consent form and in The Rights of Research Subjects that you have been given. If
you have any questions concerning your his/her rights or you have complaints about
the research, you can contact any of the following:
- The investigator or other study personnel
  - Institutional Review Board (IRB)
    - Telephone: (402) 559-6463
    - Email: IRBORA@unmc.edu
    - Mail: UNMC Institutional Review Board, 987830 Nebraska Medical
      Center, Omaha, NE 68198-7830
  - Research Subject Advocate
    - Telephone: (402) 559-6941
    - Email: unmcresa@unmc.edu

Documentation of informed consent
You are freely making a decision whether to give permission for your child to be in
this research study. Signing this form means that: You are freely making a decision
THE RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT

to be told everything you need to know about the research before you are asked to decide whether or not to take part in the research study. The research will be explained to you in a way that assures you understand enough to decide whether or not to take part.

to freely decide whether or not to take part in the research.

to decide not to be in the research, or to stop participating in the research at any time. This will not affect your medical care or your relationship with the investigator or the Nebraska Medical Center. Your doctor will still take care of you.

to ask questions about the research at any time. The investigator will answer your questions honestly and completely.

to know that your safety and welfare will always come first. The investigator will display the highest possible degree of skill and care throughout this research. Any risks or discomforts will be minimized as much as possible.

to privacy and confidentiality. The investigator will treat information about you carefully, and will respect your privacy.

... to keep all the legal rights you have now. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by taking part in this research study.

to be treated with dignity and respect at all times

The Institutional Review Board is responsible for assuring that your rights and welfare are protected. If you have any questions about your rights, contact the Institutional Review Board at (402) 559-6463.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

What Do I Need To Know Before Being In A Research Study?

You have been invited to be in a research study. Research studies are also called "research surveys", "research questionnaires" or "scientific protocols." Research is an organized plan designed to get new knowledge about health, disease, behaviors, attitudes and interactions of, among and between individuals, groups and cultures. The people who are in the research are called research subjects. The investigator is the person who is running the research study. You will get information from the investigator and the research team, and then you will be asked to give your consent to be in the research.

This sheet will help you think of questions to ask the investigator or his/her staff. You should know all these answers before you decide about being in the research.

What is the purpose of the research? Why is the investigator doing the research?

What are the risks of the research? What bad things could happen?

What are the possible benefits of the research? How might this help me?

How is the research different than what will happen if I m not in the research?

Will being in the research cost me anything extra?

Do I have to be in this research study? How will it affect my status at the institution if I say no?

Can I stop being in the research once I ve started? How?

Who will look at my records?

How do I reach the investigator if I have more questions?

Who do I call if I have questions about being a research subject?

Make sure all your questions are answered before you decide whether or not to be in this research.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thanks for coming in to talk with me for a little bit today. As we’ve talked about, I’d like to know a little bit about what you might like to read for fun. By “reading for fun” I mean what you read that doesn’t have anything to do with your school work. It isn’t assigned for class. It’s just simply something you might enjoy reading in your free time. This isn’t a test. There are no right and wrong answers. I’d love for you to tell me what you really think. Try not to think of me as your librarian and answer with anything you think I may want to hear. Please just tell me what you really think.

I may give you some ideas about things while we are talking, but don’t limit yourself to my ideas. You can tell me about ANYTHING at all that you like to read in any way. It doesn’t have to just be books.

I may take a few notes once in a while to help me remember things, but I’m going to record our discussion, so I can remember exactly what you said later on. No one will hear these recordings but me. Ok?

You don’t have to talk with me and you can stop at any time if you’d like, all right? Are you ready? Ok.
1. What would you read for fun in your free time? It can be anything you would read.

[“Do you read sports, fantasy, or other types of books? Do you read magazines, eBooks, newspapers, websites?” (Genre types and descriptors, as well as the physical format)]

2. How often do you read things like that? [“Why is that?” “Would you like to read for fun any more or less than you do now?”]

3. What are all the ways that help you decide what to read for fun? [“Do your friends, librarians, or parents suggest things? Do you find out about books online, through book orders, the catalog, advertisements?”]

4. Where do you get what you read for fun? [“Do you get the from school or public libraries or buy them from stores? Do you borrow them? Do you find them online?”]

This is your check out record from this year, can you highlight or mark the things you read for fun?

5. Let’s talk about the things that you didn’t highlight. Why didn’t you highlight those?

6. How do you find things that are hard enough for you?

7. Did someone or something inspire you to pick these books (or magazines)?
8. What did you enjoy or not enjoy about them? [How/why it was enjoyable.]

9. Do you think you'll read some other things because of these? [Why?]

10. Is there anything memorable that you have read for fun that we don’t have here in the library?

11. Is there anything else you want to tell me about reading for fun?

Thank you so much for talking with me today. I really appreciate you helping me. Do you have any questions for me? Ok. Thank you [student’s name]. You can head back to the classroom now.
Appendix C

Codes

Table 1

**Code Descriptor List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>Interesting Quotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASR</td>
<td>Assigned Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Accelerated Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARHL</td>
<td>AR has a help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARHN</td>
<td>AR as a hinderance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOB</td>
<td>Battle of the Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Golden Sower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DL</td>
<td>Difficulty Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>Independent Reading time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Activities Barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>Location - Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Location - School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCA</td>
<td>Location - Car or Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>Like to Read More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL</td>
<td>Like to Read Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Ok with amount of time reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ULC</td>
<td>Unaware of Library Choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Book Source</td>
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<td>BO</td>
<td>Book Orders</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>Home Library</td>
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<td>Book Fair</td>
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<td>School library</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>Public Library</td>
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<td>Magazines</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNF</td>
<td>Magazine NonFiction</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Genre - Science Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Genre - NonFiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>GH</td>
<td>Genre - Horror</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Series</td>
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<tr>
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<td>GN</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Genre - Adventure</td>
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<td>GB</td>
<td>Genre - Biography</td>
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<td>GCL</td>
<td>Genre - Classics</td>
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<td>Influences</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Mom has an influence</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dad has an influence</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Student Self Selects</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Peers have an influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRF</td>
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<tr>
<td>DR</td>
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<td>Time barrier</td>
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## Appendix D

### Codes Applied by Demographic

#### Table 2

**Codes Applied by Demographic**

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Read for Fun

To Learn

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Appendix E

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Note. Circulations have been tallied as check outs last year (COLY), check outs this year (COTY), and for fun this year (FFTY).
## Appendix F

### Accelerated Reader Data

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**Note.** Accelerated Reader standard measurements have been abbreviated as follows: Quizzes passed and taken by quarter (1P/T, 2P/T); Average Percent Correct earned by quarter (1APC, 2APC); Points Goal by quarter (1PG, 2PG, 3PG); Points Earned by quarter (1PE, 2PE); Average Book Level Goal by quarter (1ABLG, 2ABLG, 3ABLG); and Average Book Level earned by quarter (1ABL, 2ABL).