

**BEYOND THE LAST PAGE:
UNDERSTANDINGS OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN BOOK CLUBS AND
PEDAGOGICAL LINKS**

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ABSTRACT

The study explores teachers' experiences in book clubs and how these experiences inform their pedagogical practices. Framed by a social constructivist epistemological stance, grounded in the work of narrative inquiry, and conceptualized by transactional reader-response theory, this study explores why teachers join and sustain book club membership, the ways books clubs are used to create meaning, how participating in a book club influences pedagogical practices, and ways in which clubs are used to negotiate aspects of their teaching identities and subjectivities. Through a multifaceted qualitative research design, I worked with thirteen teachers who belong to (or have recently belonged to) a book club as a separate entity from their teaching lives. I conducted interviews with thirteen teachers; attended three meetings of three separate book clubs to contextualize the study; and administered written reading profiles to explore participants' reading practices. This research argues that teachers join and remain in book clubs for social interaction, intellectual stimulation and motivation to read 'quality' literature. Knowledges are created and validated by a community of readers capable of such recognition in a forum that does not otherwise exist. Club meetings are used in different and complex ways to negotiate teaching subjectivities and push back against fixed notions of the teacher identity. Further, this study showcases a myriad of ways that teachers' experiences in book clubs enter the classroom both explicitly and implicitly.

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INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE

“I owe everything I am and everything I will ever be to books.”

(Gary Paulsen, author of *Hatchet*)

“Reading is the sole means by which we slip, involuntarily, often helplessly, into another's skin, another's voice, another's soul.”

(Joyce Carol Oates, *Antaeus*)

I am currently a member of a book club comprised of six women and we have been together for about 18 months. We meet every four to six weeks, either at each other's houses or restaurants and cafés around the city. I have previously attempted book club membership, once in 2006 and again in 2011, but both attempts fizzled within three months. The first attempt began with an invitation to join the first meeting of a new club entitled the Feminist Women of Ottawa Reading Diverse Subjects (F-WORDS) associated with one of my favourite local, independent book stores. After three months of attending meetings with 20 or more members, I felt that the size and agenda was more akin to a university seminar than the close, intimate space that I was craving. The second attempt was my own creation of a club with a group of five friends whom I had informally engaged in book talk over the years. By our third month's book pick, things took a turn for the worse. We chose a newly released book which was more inaccessible through libraries than we thought. Momentum was lost, tensions arose, and we just decided to disband the club partly in fear of hurting our friendships. My somewhat tumultuous history with book club membership has added insight to ways in which clubs monitor their practice and protocols essential to maintaining their vitality.

Although the terminology attributed to a group of people coming together to read has taken many forms—book clubs, reading groups, literacy societies, literature circles—and has a genealogy that stretches back centuries, the study of book clubs has historically been largely

ignored and under-researched. However, research conducted on reading groups in the past three decades has brought to light the enormous complexity of meaning making processes that occur within this provocative social and cultural phenomenon (Flint, 2006; Hall, 2003; Long, 2003; Nafisi, 2003; Radway, 1983, 1988; Robertson, 2007; Robertson, Lewkowich & Rottmann, 2010; Sedo, 2004, 2011). The scope of these studies ranges from the experience of a book club formed under the precarious¹ gaze of the Iranian Republic in the late 1990s (Nafisi, 2003) to mid-western American romance novel readers and the values ascribed to their guilty pleasure (Radway, 1983). This range demonstrates that book clubs, once thought of as having little importance, have extended around the globe and have recently received much well-deserved attention.

Shifting to the field of teacher education, studies of book club practices specifically involving both pre-service and practicing teachers, have recently made their entrance—as a venue that affords teachers space to explore and negotiate their teaching identities—notable (Burbank, Kauchak & Bates; 2010; Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2009; Hall, 2009; Kooy, 2003, 2006; Parsons, 2007; Sumara, 1996; Sumara, Davis & Iftody, 2006). These studies illuminate the provocative discussions that can ensue through the collective reading experience, having potentially transformative effects as teachers work through the complexities of their prospective or current educative role. Arguably, teachers need time and space to examine the social and political interests that construct their voices which in turn, can inform their beliefs and literacy practices. Without careful consideration, teachers can silence students even with the best of intentions by giving more credence or narrative authority to some students (or themselves) over others (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Olsen & Craig; 2001). Teachers and students

¹ I use the term ‘precarious’ as it was forbidden to read North American literature during this time and consequences for being caught reading (or purchasing) such literature could have resulted in death.

alike can feel pressured to discuss only curriculum ‘specific’ topics, leaving little time and space to muddle over how they feel about what they read (Townsend, 1998). Furthermore, an emphasis on traditional basal pedagogical practices (e.g. round-robin reading, phonics, etc.) continues to resonate in many classrooms today (Cox & Hopkins, 2006; Croninger & Valli, 2009; Faulkner, 2005; Gee, 1999) even amongst teachers who believe their practices are progressive (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009; Hall, 2009). Commercialized and prescribed programs that purport ‘balanced literacy’—itself a contentious notion—have been claimed to hinder students’ meaningful literacy practices by reducing instruction to a prescribed, one-size-fits all model which takes little account of teachers’ and students’ past and present reading experiences (Hibbert & Iannacci, 2005). However, discussing books evokes serious contemplation, echoing Rosenblatt’s (1978) contention that “literature especially invites confusion about its relation to reality” (p. 21) and Alim’s (2011) point that “we need to look outward with the dual intention of redefining literacy in our private sphere as well as reconceptualizing education in the public sphere” (p. 140).

My interest in reading pedagogy stems from a variety of influences; first and foremost, I have always been an avid reader. There is nothing I enjoy more than talking with others about the books I read. To negotiate meaning with others not only enhances my understanding of the books I choose to read, but enables a constant analytical grappling, entangled with insight and interpretation, where the boundaries between fiction and reality can become blurred (Sumara, 1996). Reading invites us to ponder our thoughts, emotions and hopes as we use our experiences to relate to the story. Concurring with Barthes (1975), I believe that reading is a self-induced pleasure and those who love to read would agree that there is something quite grand about it (Ponder & Doheny, 2007). Reading provides a space where movements of self-identification and subjectivity are manifest, and acts as one main resource that individuals use to make sense of

their worlds. Although there are some areas where such ‘book talk’ can occur in the prescribed timetables of today’s schools, this, arguably, does not happen enough largely due to the assessment-driven curriculum expectations which may hinder students from developing a love for reading in the classroom (Cremin et al., 2009; Hibbert & Iannacci, 2005).

My interest in book clubs stems also from my master’s thesis research², which focused on the functions and uses of one particular book club of adult readers who read children’s fiction in St. John’s, Newfoundland. My findings illuminate how readers in a regionally distinctive community discursively engaged, specifically with children’s literature³, to share experiences, negotiate subjective positions and make meaning in complex and contradictory ways. This book club legitimized the members’ enjoyment and pleasure gained from reading children’s fiction, and acted as an integral learning space in which knowledges were validated and exchanged. Additionally, the book club acted as a space where members deliberately negotiate cultural, economic, regional, and social struggles, while both resisting and adhering to gender roles and expectations, all of which add to their banked cultural capital in their daily lives (Bourdieu, 1984). My master’s thesis entitled *Notes from the Margin: Understanding Collective Reading Experience in St. John’s, Newfoundland* sparked my desire for a deeper understanding of the ways in which discursive reading practices are used in the daily lives of individuals, specifically teachers who could potentially have the most influence on students’ reading practices.

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential links of teachers’ experiences in book club readership and how these experiences influence their reading pedagogical practices in their respective classrooms. Specifically, I sought to understand why teachers join book clubs,

² My research was part of a larger SSHRC funded (Grant # 0401-213-03) study entitled *Saltwater chronicles: Understanding reading in the regional book club of Newfoundland and Labrador* (2004-2007) guided by Primary Investigator Dr. Judith P. Robertson.

³ I use the term ‘children’s literature’ as that is the manner in which the book club members identified the genre, however the choice of literature is more typically described as young adult or juvenile fiction (Rottmann, 2008).

how book clubs function in their lives, how they use book club meetings to create meaning and negotiate teaching identities, and their perceptions of how participating in book clubs affects their reading pedagogy. Through a multifaceted qualitative research design, I worked with thirteen teachers who belong to (or recently belonged to) a book club as a separate entity from their teaching lives. I conducted interviews with thirteen teachers; attended three meetings of separate book clubs to contextualize the study; collected written reading interest profiles to explore participants' reading practices; and, kept a researcher's journal where I documented my experiences throughout the research process. I further expand on my research questions and data collection methods in the methodology section of this dissertation and will now offer a literature review on book club study research.

LITERATURE REVIEW: PATHS PREVIOUSLY TAKEN

“Good books, like good friends, are few and chosen; the more select, the more enjoyable.”
(Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*)

As previously mentioned, studies on book clubs have made a notable entrance into academia during the last few decades. Such works present a “challenge to the traditional boundaries of both literary and historical studies” (Flint, 2006, p. 514) by paying particular attention to how reading is consumed and used by the readers themselves, and the powerful discussions that book club meetings often provoke. This review of the literature encompasses a comprehensive pondering of past and present research on individual and collective reading. Specifically, I review studies on book clubs, collective reading and teacher education, teachers’ reading habits, students’ engagement with reading, and tensions of what is considering ‘reading’ both in and out of the classroom to highlight the burgeoning work that has informed this study as well as the gaps and relevant contest areas which help to situate the purpose of this research.

The works of Nafisi (2003), Long (2003) and Radway (1983, 1988) are monumental in carving out a name for studies on collective and gendered reading practices. In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi (2003) narrates her experience of forming a book club with her female undergraduate students to read Western classics deemed forbidden at the time by the reigning Islamic Republic. This club provided “a pocket of freedom” (p. 25), giving members an opportunity to indulge in their love of literature, while simultaneously voicing their frustrations (and growing understandings) of the restrictive⁴ regime under which they were forced to live. Reading became an escape from gender oppression, a site for pedagogical subversion and a hope that life could be otherwise (Flint, 2006). It afforded these women not only the opportunities to

⁴ I use the term ‘restrictive’ here as a situated time and experience, expressed by Nafisi while living with the social, cultural and political realities under the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran during the 1990s.

recognize their subjectivities, but to also create and negotiate new ones that were not the “figment of someone else’s dreams” (Nafisi, 2003, p.28).

Long’s (2003) comprehensive study of (mainly) women’s reading groups in the United States argues that collective reading has historically been, and remains, a site for women to assert agency. Her research comprised extensive interviews with members and attendance at weekly meetings over three years. Long’s work problematized the traditional view of reading as a wholly private endeavour and attested that for (mainly) women, reading is fundamentally and inherently a social activity. Arguably, the historical image of the ‘woman reader’ as portrayed by Long (2003) and Seaholm (1988), as a passive consumer of culture activity defunct of educational status has left an indelible mark on the manner in which both contemporary women readers and book clubs are viewed. Echoing historical studies of literary societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Flint, 2006; Seaholm, 1988), Long argues that reading groups allowed for the merging of public and private life and the opportunity for women to partake in social activities outside the home. In conjunction with their contemporary counterparts, literary societies encouraged women to redefine and reconsider themselves “to some degree, different from that of wife, mother and homemaker” (Long, 2003, p. 49).

Long (2003) suggests that both past and present book clubs proudly assert their tendency to balance the ‘classics’ with ‘good’ mainstream fiction, tending to shun popular culture and avant-garde literature. Radway’s (1983) influential study of women reading romance novels, as opposed to the more mainstream fiction that book clubs often insist upon, is the cornerstone of research into gendered reading practices. She problematizes the basis for certain literary criticisms, which belittle the reading choices made by romance readers. Further, Radway argues that our cultural knowledge of women’s collective reading experience is incomplete and warns

that researchers must explore what the event of romance reading means to the women who ‘ingest’ these books. This study focused on the actual event of reading and how the text is interpreted and used by the women who engage with it, exploring beyond the surface of what the text means to these readers. Readers enjoy their self-indulgence and justify their guilty pleasures by linking their reading of romance novels to the values of escaping domestic drudgery and the learning of new information.

Both Radway’s (1988) later study of commercialized book clubs in New York City and Devlin-Glass’s (2001) study of four Australian book clubs report the desire to create and maintain a non-hierarchical, non-elitist atmosphere even if the clubs were identified and assumed by the members to be associated with a certain caliber of social distinction. Radway shows that the editors of *The-Book-of-the-Month-Club* acted as a literary authority, and made choices that were presumed to be those that would draw “the reader into its world by seemingly erasing the boundaries between the text itself and external reality” (p. 537). The books these editors chose were preoccupied with values that were congruent with the editors’ dominant ‘middlebrow’ identities and offered members social distinction. Similarly, Devlin-Glass’s findings indicate that members have a reading repertoire that is ‘middlebrow,’ gendered (i.e., women-centred), and culture-specific. What was found to be of the utmost importance for these women was to see their participation in these groups’ discussions as a form of strength and possibility, and in which to maintain their ‘cultural currency’ (Bourdieu, 1984) as socially distinct, literate and intellectual citizens. The book club members in Devlin-Glass’s study saw books as cultural markers, adding to their store of cultural capital, and their degree of social distinction.

It is difficult to discuss the perceived links between education, social distinction and reading groups in North America without including Oprah. Revolutionizing perceptions of how

book clubs function as ideological spaces of privilege and leisure, *Oprah's Book Club* has been well documented in the media yet has received little attention from the academic community. As Kaufman (2004) argues, Oprah asserts that the purpose of her book club is to get America reading: to reunite literacy and those who can read but for whatever reason have chosen not to. Oprah's role in her book club, and the books that she chooses, illustrate the ways in which hierarchies of taste, as signalled by Devlin-Glass (2001), take shape. Oprah maintained cultural authority as a 'literacy sponsor'⁵ (Brandt, 1998) through the illusion of intimacy. Conveying messages of personal transformation, self-improvement and 'good taste,' Oprah simultaneously benefited from her success through ratings and revenue, as did the authors of the works she read. However, Sedo (2004) found that a certain resistance exists to this mode of literary sponsorship. Many book club participants in her Vancouver study resisted reading 'Oprah's picks', and were adamant about distinguishing their reading choices from hers. To read *her* books was seen as a symbolic gesture towards 'lowbrow literature'; thus it was important for these readers to distinguish themselves from the bestseller category that Oprah often favours. Nonetheless, placing significant merit on this populist phenomenon, Hall (2003) highlights that *Oprah's Book Club* has the potential to invite "teachers to consider, by contrast, the ways that the classroom study of literature sometimes dims the joy of reading" (p. 665).

Book Clubs and Teacher Education

A flourishing relationship has recently occurred between book clubs and teacher education. Insightful discussions that typically ensue in the collective reading experience have potentially transformative effects for pre-service teachers. Hall (2009), Parsons (2007) and Kooy (2003) found their respective teacher candidates' understanding of diversity and literacy

⁵ A sponsor of literacy is what Brandt (1998) refers to as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166)

broadened by participating in a book club. Hall (2009) posits that book club practice in her teacher education course provided a way for pre-service teachers to “deepen, broaden and explore their visions of self as literacy teachers...that may be influenced by the activities teachers engaged in” (p. 300). Similarly, Parsons argues that book clubs she created allowed teacher candidates to trace their experiences of becoming literate and develop meta-knowledge – the understanding of the nature of reading and writing – that is argued to be essential for teachers to possess in order to make sound instructional decisions. However, “few adults, even the most actively literate among us, have much insight into the nature of the act [reading] itself, yet significant knowledge of literature and of reading are central foundations for teachers of literacy” (p. 19). Book clubs also afforded participants to view reading as active and meaningful which differed from the “passive, correct-answer-driven process that [some] had come to know” (p. 20). It is precisely the potential perpetuation of reading as a passive, surface-level and predominantly efferent act (Rosenblatt, 1978) that is a concern of Parsons and others alike (Cremin et al., 2009; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Hall, 2009). A teacher’s attitude about literacy has a profound and lasting effect on “his/her ability to inspire students to engage meaningfully with literacy” as not only do “readers make better...reading teachers, but they make better teachers overall (Parsons, 2007, p. 21). Kooy (2003) professes that book clubs “crept into her English teacher education class as a natural “follow up to the literacy autobiography that examines a reader’s past” (p. 138). Teacher education typically endorses the idea of reflection, tracing early experiences of learning in many capacities (not just reading), and confronting one’s biases, all of which have been shown to be revealed through book club practice.

Although studies of pre-service teacher educators incorporating book club practices into the classroom shed light on how effective they can be in creating space for rich discussions of

literary works, using book clubs in classes is not without obstacles. In their study of pre-service teachers' responses to a text deemed controversial, Sumara, Davis, and Iftody (2006) argue that readers must be situated in a context where they feel able to represent their personal responses or "the ability for the 'collective mind' to emerge from shared discussions is compromised" (p. 63). While on the surface, the collective discussion appeared to address pertinent issues that arose in text – namely homophobia and bullying – the written reflections of participants suggested otherwise. Some voiced feeling silenced by the attention given to practices and activities associated with 'good teaching' in the collective discussion rather than meaningful interpretations of the text. Although authors can only speculate, they believe that "the rich literary identifications individual readers had with [the novel] were shadowed by the normalizing fictions of good teaching and good teaching practices" (p. 65). While the aforementioned studies posit the benefits and potential transformative effects from the book club experience, I am aware that challenges, like confronting one's presumptions and biases, may be events that are underreported in work with reading groups.

Book Clubs and Teachers

The work of Sumara (1996) and Kooy (2003, 2006) lay the groundwork most relevant to my proposed research. Sumara's (1996) work with reader-response and seasoned teachers sheds light on the complexities of the collective reading experience. Sharing his encounters in a reading group with fellow high school English teachers, Sumara discusses the tensions these teachers felt between the desire of the members to 'dwell' and 'linger' with their chosen text yet the need to facilitate only the brief 'touring' (meaning a brief encounter) of texts with their respective students in the classroom, in order to align with daily curriculum demands and time constraints. The experience of reading together helped this group of teachers to understand these

tensions and realize that they were trying to do too much too fast in their respective classrooms. Further, Sumara boldly invokes Iser's (1978) claims that in order for the imagination to learn new ways of seeing, readers (teachers) must work through the difficulty and discomfort of reading.

Kooy's (2006) work with clubs solely comprised of teachers illustrates how collective reading can help educators negotiate their teaching identities. Kooy documents lives of two teacher book clubs – one comprised of new teachers extending from her teacher education courses and the other of seasoned teachers which she had been a member of – and demonstrates how each cohort 'used' the club. Reading only fictional books that incorporate an aspect of teaching, Kooy captures how teachers use the space to negotiate their philosophy of teaching, to ascribe to and resist the teacher identity, reflect on pedagogical practices, and re-story their teaching selves. Drawing on the intersects of narrative inquiry, social constructivism and dialogical theory, Kooy shares the stories of collaborative knowledge exchange, self-reflective practices and friendship that she concludes help teachers negotiate "what it means to be a teacher" (p. 162).

Book Clubs as Professional Development

It is noteworthy to briefly mention the occurrence of studies on professional development (PD) that takes the shape of book clubs. Some researchers have documented the use a book club format as a way for teachers to reflect on their current theories and practices (Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010; Flood & Lapp, 1994), whereas others are specifically oriented towards creating reading teachers and strive towards pedagogy that incorporates students' personal literacies and meaning-making potentials (Cremin et al., 2009) and some incorporate both (Kooy, 2003, 2006). The format and mandate in these studies illuminate both the potential benefits as well as the

complexity of working within teacher book clubs in a contrived, professional development fashion. Burbank and colleagues' (2010) study viewed book clubs as a mechanism to understand how both pre-service and practicing teachers utilized their respective book clubs. Facilitated around books that only focused on aspects of teaching, authors found that both groups valued the meetings. Practicing teachers' discussions centered on reflections of pedagogical beliefs, institutional and organizational factors impacting students, and reservations about current practices whereas pre-service teachers' discussions focused more on instructional strategies, content delivery, and were noted to be more positive about trying new ideas in the classroom. Burbank and colleagues call for an examination of the long term effects of professional book clubs and how this might enhance teaching.

Cremin and colleagues (2009) created professional book clubs with the goal of encouraging "reading teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach" (p. 15). The authors found that teachers' knowledge base of children's literature was "typically narrow as this knowledge isn't recognized as part of the professional repertoires of teachers" (p. 11). Most of the teachers involved in their study viewed reading as instruction and assessment-oriented, did not plan specifically to support children's reading pleasure, and viewed unfamiliar texts as 'risky'. As book club meetings progressed, conversations shifted from a content focus (e.g. how to teach from the text) to discussions that focused more on the creation of meaning and how the book affected particular individuals. This shift echoes Long (2003)'s assertion that "readers enjoy finding something they can recognize and feel close to...sometimes providing them with self-reflective insight, much like seeing oneself through a mirror as well as exploring things that are strange and unfamiliar which they can learn from" (p. 177). After participating in professional book clubs, Cremin and colleagues found that some teacher participants engaged

with these 'risky' texts and rekindled their forgotten love for reading. Teacher participants reported that their increased knowledge of children's literature was often accompanied by an increased enthusiasm to talk to students about prospective books, gathering of a broader collection of texts for students to choose from, and rearranging part of the classroom into reading cafes and tents to become more conducive to reading for pleasure.

Although studies that couch a professional mandate into book club practice have shown to be effective in negotiating aspects of their subjectivities in relation to the teacher identity, teachers tend to be skeptical of PD activities. PD is often viewed as just another addition to the already overwhelming pile of curriculum initiatives for teachers (Putman, Smith, & Cassady, 2009). This can be particularly true for beginning teachers who already feel overwhelmed by the daily demands of the teaching profession. Kooy (2003) agrees, and argues that teachers are increasingly expected to follow orders, reverting towards the transmissive modes of teaching and "widening the gap between text and pleasure – between pedagogy and reading experiences" (p. 143). It is the effect that book clubs can potentially have on narrowing or reconceptualizing this gap and supporting teachers reading practices that drives my desire to embark on this research project.

Teachers and Reading

Teachers reading habits have been a concern of researchers for some time as research powerfully suggests that teachers' attitudes towards reading and their use of reading practices in the classroom are interrelated (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Magro, 2003; Manna & Misheff, 1987; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1993, 1995; Mueller, 1973). Teachers who read for pleasure have been found to favour such practices as recreational readings and sharing their enthusiasm for engaging with books. (Atwell, 1987, 2007; Daisey, 2010; Sumara,

1996). Similarly, pre-service teachers who enjoy reading have reported to anticipate such practices, suggesting the direct link between teachers reading habits and instructional reading practices (Duchein, Frazier, Konopak & Palmer, 1994). Although many studies posit the importance of exploring the links between teachers' reading habits and how reading is approached in their respective classrooms, particularly in motivating students to read, findings often lead to conclusions and implications for classroom practice based solely on frequency and duration of teachers reading practices. Nonetheless, the contribution of these studies allows for a starting point of discussion into teachers' motivations for reading and talking about reading in their classroom.

In earlier studies both Mueller (1973) and Mour (1977) found that their teacher education students did not place a high value on reading as top leisure activity. Both studies urged teachers to confront the values they place on reading in order to avoid perpetuating a generation of alliterates—those who can read but who chose to not. Further, encouraging teachers to reflect how they approach reading themselves supports a better understanding of their students reading habits and potential struggles (Mueller, 1973). In a more recent investigation of the relationship between teacher reading rituals and their instructional practices, McKool & Gespass (2009) reported teachers who read more frequently and for longer sustained periods of time used instructional practices for reading that were associated with intrinsic motivation more so than their counterparts who reported to read less often and for shorter periods of time. Sharing personal insight from their reading experiences, discussing books read in the class, allotting time for read alouds and independent reading in the classroom, and providing some choice in the material that their students read were practices used that reinforced or supported an intrinsic motivation to read. Although this relationship between regular reading practices and best

practices align with other research findings (Cremin et al., 2009; Morrison, Jacobs & Swinyard, 1999), some have argued otherwise, problematizing this assumed relationship. Burgess, Sargent & Hill (2011), sharing a similar concern for teachers reading habits, found very few significant differences in teaching practices between teachers in their study who read more frequently over ones who did not. However, authors did find that teachers who had greater knowledge of children's literature, which has been argued to have a crucial influence on the breadth and depth of texts in the classroom (Cremin, et al., 2009; Trelease, 2006), reported using 'best' practices more frequently than those teachers deemed less knowledgeable in regards to children's literature.

Applegate and Applegate (2004) created a Literacy Habits Questionnaire (LHQ) to determine teacher candidates' reading engagement using the biblical story of the Apostle Peter as a backdrop to think about motivating students to read. When asked for money by a beggar, Peter replies that he cannot give what he does not have. Applied to teachers, authors question how a motivation to read can be nurtured by one who does not find pleasure in the act of reading. Results revealed that nearly half of participants expressed a lack of enthusiasm for reading and not surprisingly, meager personal reading habits. One finding of interest was the positive correlation between college (university) level reading experience and level of enjoyment, offering a hopeful suggestion that the enjoyment of reading can flourish in higher education. This was also found by Daisey (2010), who aptly states that "it is never too late to find a magical text" (p. 681). Findings from Nathanson, Pruslow & Levitt (2008) also indicate a high prevalence of *aliteracy*, defined as "the ability to read but a disinterest in personal reading" (p. 313) among teachers, further suggesting a need to encourage teachers to engage more with literature in order to transact with their students about reading and reading habits. Conveying

their disappointment, authors conclude “[t]his is a sobering and unsatisfactory situation, which, we believe, could have negative implications for the literacy of future generations” (p. 318). Some have even claimed that an intervention in teacher education programs is necessary to unpack teacher candidates’ relationships with texts and identity pedagogical beliefs and practices that promote reading literacy in the classroom (Clark & Medina, 2000; Daisey 2010).

Methodologically speaking, the focus of many of these aforementioned studies is placed on reading but valued in terms of how much or how often teachers are reading, usually determined by administering questionnaires. Frequency and duration are, admittedly, components of reading, aligning with the notion of the more one reads, the better reader one becomes (Smith, 1989). Nonetheless, teachers’ experiences with reading and reasons why they read remain missing in recent research. The contribution of studies such as these add to our understandings of potential links between teachers’ reading habits and classroom practice; however, the experiential aspect of reading, or what it means to enjoy reading by the teachers who read for pleasure, is, arguably, a crucial component that has been overlooked. Although I hope that individuals partake in activities they enjoy as much as possible, I personally would not be able to accurately report how many minutes per day or per week that I choose to read as it simply depends on the week, or the month, or the season; whether or not I am engaged in the book; and, what is happening in my life. I question whether reading for pleasure or the value readers place on reading as an enjoyable event can solely be measured by frequency and time or how many books read per month. Although time and duration are factors, it is impossible to unpack reading habits with these two parameters bracketing the act of reading.

Turning the page to a more encompassing approach to teachers’ reading practices, authors such as Powell-Brown (2003) argue for teachers to be reading role models for their

students, acting as spark plugs for reading literacy. Teachers need to be able to promote reading in a fun and engaging way in order to avoid the pitfalls of students conceptualizing reading as rote learning and a chore to be endured (Aldana & Wilkes, 2010). Invoking Rosenblatt's transactional reading theory here sheds lights on how teachers who enjoy reading can act as these spark plugs and engage students with reading. As previously discussed, certain instructional practices such as read alouds, allowing students choice in their reading, discussion about literature, etc., have been noted to create an engaging atmosphere for readers whilst supporting the intrinsic motivation to read. These aforementioned instructional practices have been argued to be used by teachers who partake in more aesthetic stances of reading and understand the lived through experience that occurs in the reading event. Rosenblatt (1978) asserts that a text can be read both aesthetically and efferently, depending on the focus the reader. Thinking of aesthetic and efferent stances of reading as a continuum, the reading event flows between the lived through experience on one pole and what can be captured and carried away from the text on the other⁶. Although every act of reading involved both aesthetic and efferent components, the instructional practices favoured by aforementioned studies are, arguably, driven by aesthetic stances of reading, which Rosenblatt further contends needs to be emphasized in schools. In turn, studies that have used a transactional theory of reading have found that teachers, who read efferently with a focus on retaining information to be carried away at the end of the event, tend to favour instructional strategies that conform to their reading stances. It is noteworthy to mention that while Rosenblatt believes that both aesthetic and efferent stances should be taught, it is the lived through aesthetic stance that instills a love and a joy for reading but to her dismay, is most often neglected in schools (Rosenblatt, 1982).

⁶ This is further unpacked in the Theoretical Framework section

Students and Reading

While statistics from standardized tests are admittedly problematic for a variety of reasons, results from the *Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)* and the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011: Canada in Context* can act as a snapshot of students' reading practices in Canada as well as starting point for discussion. According to the *Reading for Joy Report*, the percentage of Ontario students in Grades 3 and 6 who report that they enjoy reading has declined in the last decade from 76%-50% and 65%-50%, respectively⁷. This report claims that the enjoyment of reading is a predictor of higher student achievement, suggesting that those students who like to read typically succeed in school. This positive relationship is argued to be stronger for elementary students than secondary students as reading for pleasure seems to wane in the teenage years (Murphy, 2013; Petscher, 2010; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Notwithstanding that such statistics could be based on a misinterpretation of what reading pertains to (i.e. reading comics or digital media may not be perceived as *reading*), this demise in reading enjoyment has been a recent concern for scholars, educators, and parents alike.

An understanding of students' reading engagement in schools can be partially gleaned from the results of the *PIRLS 2011: Canada in Context*⁸. Globally, an average of 42% of students report that they are engaged during reading lessons with Canadian students falling slightly below at 39%. With variance across the provinces, with 30% in Quebec and 49% in Newfoundland, the best case scenario still portrays less than half of Canadian students reported to be engaged during reading lessons. Arguably, this signals that the way reading is approached, practiced, defined and valued in schools is failing at creating an atmosphere of engaged readers. Founder of the

⁷ Taken from EQAO statistics, from 1998/99-2010/11 as cited in *the People for Education, Reading for Joy Report*, 2011.

⁸ Results developed by Labrecque, Chuy, Brochu & Houme (2011).

National Reading Campaign, Patsy Aldana (2008) concurs, urging all educational stakeholders to listen to what these results are parlaying and to question what is happening in our literacy classrooms. Children need books that are windows and ones that are mirrors: “they need to look out at the world; they need to look in on themselves” (n.p.). Even if we strip away all the benefits that can be gleaned from enjoying reading and only look through a functional literacy perspective, Aldana & Wilkes (2010) suggest that we should still value higher standardized testing scores. This is an interesting sentiment from two prominent advocates of reading enjoyment, who have a vested interest in the future of Canadian readers, further emphasizing the most basic and rudimentary fact that reading for pleasure promotes success.

Book Clubs and Literature Circles

Studies using book clubs in classrooms offer a glimmer of hope to this dismal portrayal of student engagement with reading (Alvermann, Young, Weaver, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, Trash & Zalewski, 1996; Carrison, Ernst-Slavit, 2005; Certo, Moxley, Reffitt & Miller, 2010; Daniels, 2002; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Heydon, 2003; McMahon & Raphael, 1997). Although the terminology slightly differs, both Daniels’s (2002) *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* and McMahon & Raphael’s (1997) *The Book Club Connection: Literacy Learning and Classroom Talk* provide a comprehensive portrait of using small group, peer-lead reading discussion groups in classrooms as early as Grade 1. Both aforementioned texts define reading—as an active, complex, social and meaning-making process—with practical applications of facilitating book clubs. Further, both showcase a multiplicity of voices from fellow literacy scholars, teachers, and (more importantly) students who have experienced book club practice in the classroom. Daniels attributes the recent success of book clubs in schools, in part, to the burgeoning attention that adult book clubs have received. He views characteristics of

book clubs such as reading books that move and inspire, promote positive change, and creating communities of readers as implicit models, or rather a “powerful template” (p.3) to what should be occurring in classrooms. Similarly, disenfranchised with the ubiquity of conventional teacher-led reading instruction, McMahon & Raphael admit that they began using book clubs with their respective students as a way to tote more books in classrooms, allow students choice in what they read, and create meaningful opportunities for student-led discussion about books in a community. These generative texts act as guides for teachers, particularly those interested but unsure of how to create, model and sustain book club practice in their classrooms. Finally, both texts are well cited in subsequent studies that explore teachers’ and students’ perceptions of book clubs in the classroom (e.g. Certo, Moxley, Refitt & Miller, 2010; Hadijioannou, 2007; Evans, 2002; King, 2001; Kong & Fitch, 2003) Interestingly, although Daniels (2002) commends McMahon & Raphael’s (1997) components of book club practice, McMahon & Raphael do not make any reference to Daniels’ earlier work (as the first edition *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* was published in 1994).

Studies that have extended the work of the formative texts above augment understandings and perceptions of book club practices in the classroom (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005; Certo et al., 2010; DeNicolò, 2010; Evans, 2002; Goatly, Brock & Raphael, 1995; Hadijioannou, 2007; Heydon, 2003; King, 2001; Kong & Fitch, 2003). Certo and colleagues (2010) found that using literature circles across the primary/junior grades increased student talk, enhanced understandings of the books and connections to students’ lives, and were described by the students as the most enjoyable part of language arts. These conclusions reflected earlier findings that book club practice improves students’ comprehension of books, eagerness to raise opinions, sharing of knowledges, and meaning creation by connecting the story to students’ personal lives

more often than in whole class discussion (Evans, 2002; Hadjioannou, 2007; King, 2001; Kong & Fitch, 2003). In addition to these reported benefits, Evans' (2002) work illustrates that book clubs helped students' learn what comprises a good group discussion (e.g. reading the book, respecting other opinions, listening, clarifying, elaborating, etc.). Students have also been reported to enjoy sharing ideas together, being part of a team (King, 2001) and even shifting from not knowing how to respond to enjoying actively participating in book club conversations (Kong & Fitch, 2003). Furthermore, studies which focus exclusively on students with diverse linguistic backgrounds (e.g. English language learners) participating in book clubs have found parallel benefits to those listed above. In addition, such practices promote opportunities to collaborate across language proficiency levels and challenge previously held notions of what counts as language in language arts classrooms (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005; DeNicolo, 2010; Goatly, Brock & Raphael, 1995; Heydon, 2003). These studies further emphasize the integral part that book clubs can play in creating prospects for all students to engage with 'real' literature rather than basal reading supplements which can often be dominant, particularly when working with students with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

It would be superficial to merely present the benefits of book club practices in the classroom without (briefly) noting the challenges. Daniels (2002) lists the pressure for assessment-driven literacy practices, terminology misuse, and overuse of roles to be impediments to effective book club practice. Described as the "the most malignant influence in education today" (p. 10), the demand for constant assessment, not surprisingly, is argued to be a major obstacle for some teachers to defend large chunks of time necessary for book club discussion. In addition, any type of reading can be referred to as 'literature circles' even when teacher-led and controlled. Finally, the overuse of selected roles common to literature circles (i.e.

scriber, questioner, connector, summarizer), can further stifle and undermine the very discussions that book clubs are meant to support (Goatley, Brock & Raphael, 1995). Although McMahon & Raphael (1997) are less transparent about challenges in facilitating book clubs in the classroom, contributing authors of *The Book Club Connection: Literacy Learning and Classroom Talk* voice their experience of overcoming obstacles such as finding appropriate texts for varying student levels and balancing instructional support with quiet observation. Both Hadijannaou (2007) and Alvermann, et al. (1996) add that teacher beliefs need to be structured around the principle that teaching involves facilitating student learning in order to authenticate student-led discussion. Despite these reported challenges, there is a strong sense garnered from the literature that book club practice is an effective and enjoyable way for students to actively engage with books and create meaning.

The Culprit: Tensions Between In-School and Out-of-School Literacies

Decade after decade, reading in/for school has continued to lack meaning for many, contributing to a trend of disengaged readers previously mentioned (Atwell, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Gee, 1999; Freebody and Freiberg, 2001; Rieck, 1977; Schwartz, 1996). Much of the recent literature on classroom literacy practices suggests a shift away from the traditional teaching of reading as narrowly transmissive, dominantly focused on the mechanics of reading and writing toward a new constructivist and holistic approach to the meaning-making process that incorporates students' experiences and relational knowledges. Although this ideological and theoretical shift is both supported and exemplified by some (Dewey, 1961; Gould, 2005; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Short, 1999; Smagorinsky, 2009), others insist that basal 'traditional' reading pedagogy resonates in many classrooms practices today (Cox & Hopkins, 2006; Croninger & Valli, 2009; Gee, 1999; Faulkner, 2005; Freebody & Freiberg, 2001) even amongst teachers who

believe their practices are progressive (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009; Cremin, et al., 2009). Adding to the messiness of the situation are the perpetual gaps and tension between the construction of teachers' or school-based literacies and students' or personal literacies. These gaps suggest that the reading pedagogy often used in today's schools does not align with students' interests, resulting in the production of struggling and/or disengaged readers. School-based literacies as defined by Faulkner (2005) are those "linked to literate practices that allow students to function in the classroom and also help to prepare students for a life beyond school...often described as the ability to read, write, and interpret text" (p. 108). Conversely, personal or student literacies are "those out-of-school literacies linked to literate practices that influence personal, social and individual lives of children" (Faulkner, 2005, p. 108-109). Arguably, students' literacies also function in equipping students for life beyond school but are often not recognized nor valued in this capacity.

If there is any hope in this bleak portrayal of student engagement with texts, the enjoyment of reading needs to co-exist with curriculum (Daisey, 2010). The acknowledgement of a shift in reading focus is apparent in studies and reports that attempt to convey or report on best practices. However, the assistance or suggestions offered are, arguably, often generic, ambiguous, and speculative. For example, *The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004) zealously suggests "an effective timetable will provide large blocks of time—*ideally two hours*—for students to develop their literacy skills....engage in research and inquiry in all subject areas..." [italics added] (p. 29) yet fails to suggest how a teacher could possibly allot two hours for the development of literacy skills within the confines of a typical daily timetable. More recent documents entitled *Capacity Building Series: Grand Conversations in Junior Classrooms* (2010) put forth by the Literacy and

Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) offer an optimistic shift, encouraging teachers to listen to students' book talk and adopt a dialogic stance towards reading, where "students engage in conversation in order to share, shape and improve their understandings of text...in order to move their own thinking forward" (2011, p. 1). Although these documents are well-referenced with quotes in textboxes by notable scholars, there is little suggestion on the kinds of strategies and assessment tools that teachers would need to create an atmosphere where students engage in grand conversations about literature.

Croninger & Valli (2009), in their five year longitudinal study of reading instructional practices of fourth and fifth graders in U.S. elementary schools, present a number of challenges facing teachers, one of which is time. Although schools propose to set anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes per day aside for a solid 'block' of reading instruction, various factors influenced the scope of the content and strategies teachers used for reading. One of the most influential findings was that students were more likely to be engaged in repetitive drill and practice work designed for preparing them for reading assessment as standardized testing time approached. During 'regular' reading blocks, other factors such as student mobility (in and out of the classroom) affected 20% of students, shared instruction with another adult in the room, supplemental reading instruction and other intervention programs blurred the scheduled time allotted for reading. Furthermore, critiques of studies of reading practices (Croninger & Valli, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2009) rarely describe in detail what happens during these reading blocks, allowing to question whether students are actually given the opportunity to enjoy uninterrupted reading at all or whether the dominance of prescribed reading models ensues.

It is noteworthy to mention that although the literature calls for a narrowing of the gap between in-school and out-of-school literacies, a reconceptualizing of this gap as a space to

work within can also have powerful implications for classroom practice. Envisioning this space working site, perhaps a hybrid site of struggle (Bhabha, 1994) can create opportunities for the merging of curriculum with students' interest, pedagogy with experiences, and text with pleasure. It has been strongly suggested that book clubs are one such site where knowledges can be blended and celebrated instead of controlled and dichotomized between what is valued in and outside of the classroom (Kooy, 2006; Long, 2003; Maniotes, 2005; Sedo, 2004; Sumara, 1996). Teachers who view these gaps as spaces to work within can enter into them with the kinds of pedagogical approaches previously discussed that create the atmosphere for students to engage in meaningful literacy practices.

Chapter Summary

This literature review comprises a wide range of studies on book club research, book clubs and education, teachers' reading habits, and students' engagement with reading. Throughout this review, I have attempted to illustrate the literature that has informed my understandings of previous research conducted. I have highlighted significant gaps in past and current research and discussed relevant contested areas, which has helped me to situate my research questions on teachers' book club experiences and potential links to pedagogical practices within the greater body of research. I now turn to the theoretical framework which adds to the foundation of the research project.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“A novel or a poem or a play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols”

(Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*)

“We do not learn from our experience...we learn from reflecting on our experience”

(John Dewey, *Experience and Education*)

My study will be viewed through the lens of a social constructivist paradigm, grounded in the work of narrative inquiry, and framed by reader-response theory as I work through where the intersections and tensions lie in relation to teachers’ experiences of creating knowledge and meaning from transacting with books. Premised on the notion that ideas shapes our experiences and in turn, experiences shape our ideas, Deweyan social constructivism (also known as idea-based social constructivism) provides a way to view knowledge as individually and socially produced. This lens views individuals as active participants as we transact with their surroundings to create knowledge. Narrative inquiry embraces “narrative both as the method and phenomena of study” (Clandinin, 2007, p. 5), allowing for a collaborative event between researcher and participant. Narrative inquiry has guided me to listen attentively to the narrative stories of individual and collective reading experiences as told by participants. Reader-response theory positions readers as active agents, transacting with text to create meaning and understanding based on our experience. Further, Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argues that as readers, we seek to participate in another’s vision “to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make [one’s] life more comprehensible” (p. 7). I was attentive to the ways in which my participants transacted with text as they articulated what was gained from book club membership. Drawing on these aforementioned theories and perspectives has helped me to frame my understandings of how members make

sense of their shared reading experiences and the potential link to their classroom reading practices.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a paradigm “that construes learning as an interpretive, recursive, non-linear building process by active learners interacting with their surroundings – the physical and social world” (Fosnot & Perry, 2005, p. 34). Although the term social constructivism often appears in the lexicon of educational research, a concise definition is surprisingly scarce in the literature. Schwandt (1994) proposes that among all the branches of constructivism, proponents “share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (p. 118) and believes that “what we take as knowledge and truths are a result of perspective....as *created*, not *discovered* by the mind” [emphasis added] (p. 125). Much like the ontological assumptions of narrative inquiry, this philosophy was born out of a rejection of traditional views of knowledge and truth as representations of a reality independent of the knower.

I see the social constructivist framework as a continuum ranging from views of knowledge creation as individual (as in traditional radical constructivism) to knowledge creation through social interactions (social constructionism). On one end of the constructivist spectrum sits radical or schema-based constructivism (Prawat, 1996) which is most closely associated with von Glaserfeld, who contends that knowledge “does not and cannot have the purpose of producing representations of an independent reality, but instead has an adaptive function” (p. 3). Rather “knowledge proceeds neither solely from the experiences of object nor from an innate programming performed in the subject but from successive constructions” (Fosnot & Perry, 2005, p. 17). These constructions or schemes are perceived through our sensory world and are “a

result of our own perceptual activities, therefore specific to our way of perceiving or conceiving” (von Glaserfeld, 2005, p. 4). Learning occurs as a process of self-organization; “[it] follows an unvarying sequence, ending in the construction of schemes...constructed in the head, mediate between mind and world, subject and object” (Prawat, 1996, p. 216). Simply put, radical constructivism is concerned with how meanings become constructed by the individual’s perceptions of the social world. Taken to an educational context, this dismantles the traditional transmissive idea that knowledge can be transferred from teacher to student (von Glaserfeld, 2005) as students do not automatically internalize the perceptions and inferences of teachers. Although radical constructivism purports that knowledge is based on our perceptions, the focus is centered on the individual construction of schemes.

Moving along the constructivist spectrum towards a more social focus is socio-cultural theory, most often associated with Vygotsky (1978). Socio-culturalists reject the notion that the focal point of knowledge creation is in the individual and views knowledge as a social construction; “a property of organized collectives” (Toulmin, 1995, p. xiv). This view downplays the prominent role of psychological tools of knowledge construction and sees a more knowledgeable other (often viewed a teacher or parent) that structures the learning experience of the individual (child) through the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as “the distance between the child’s actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In addition, a Vygotskian perspective builds on a student’s prior knowledge which is essential to enhance learning, as both the child and the learning encounter have a previous history. Vygotsky also postulated that “all higher order functions originate as actual relations between human

individuals” (adults included) (p. 57); that is, knowledge originates from social interactions.

Educationally, an apprentice model suits this perspective as ‘experts’ (teachers) model how to use tools or cultural artefacts for students to master.

Inching further along the constructivist spectrum is social constructionism which is most often associated with Gergen (1994) and Rorty (1989). This perspective focuses its attention to the intersubjectively shared, social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Schwandt, 1994). Social constructionists subscribe that everything is essentially linguistic (Prawat, 1996) and focus on “the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 127). Prawat argues that this language based approach to learning does not offer any room for reality nor “a solution to how one bridges the gap between the social world of language and the private world of cognition” (p. 222).

Each of the constructivisms presented fall somewhere between the mind and world split and are associated with various philosophers. I also concur with Greene (2005) that “social constructivisms have clustered into an attack on objectivity...and efforts to *understand* rather than to know, to acknowledge that there are many vantage points that may not come together on a common ground” (p. 111). I situate myself with Deweyan/idea-based social constructivism where the individual is seen as an active participant in the reciprocal, or transactional, activities that take place, which Prawat (1996) argues to be less concerned with the mind/world dilemma of the aforementioned constructivisms. Deweyan constructivism assigns equal priority to both the social and individual in the development of meaning. Premised on the notion that ideas, created by interacting with objects and events, “serve as mediators in both the public and private arenas” (p. 223). Learning, meaning in the creation of ideas, “is as much social as it is individual” (Greene, 1994, 16). The tenets of this form of social constructivism align with

narrative inquiry, positing that experience forms the basis of meaning. Parallel to this notion that ideas are seen as moving back and forth between the mind and world, stories “become recipes for structuring experience itself, laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present, but for directing it into the future” (Bruner, 1994, p. 36). Both experiences and the narrative that narrates the experiences, have a transactional quality between individual (mind) and social (world), much like Dewey’s notion of ideas (Dewey, 1961; Prawat, 1996). In his writing, Dewey (1933/1986, 1961) emphasizes that experience is the main driver of inquiry. His concepts of the continuity and interaction of experience, meaning that we bring a part of each past experience to the present which in turn affects our future experiences, are pivotal understanding the way we approach our experiences. Our experience creates ideas and our ideas in turn, shape our experience. I concur with Dewey’s (1961) cautionary claim that “[t]here is no mistake more common in schools than ignoring the self-propelling power of an idea....it carries the students into new fields, branches out into new ideas as a plant sends forth new shoots” (p. 334). Furthermore, in social constructivism, researchers actively participate in the research and work through their biases and interpretations (Creswell, 2007) of the experience they seek in order to understand the experience itself.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, particularly in educational research, is strongly influenced by Dewey’s (1933/1986, 1961) work on experience as the foreground of education. As espoused by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience in stories lived and told by individuals. There are many divergent views on the methodology or the *doing* of narrative inquiry, but arguably, the one point of constancy is the study of experience (Chase, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008).

Although seeking to understand and valorize individual experience is the fundamental cornerstone, narrative inquiry is also an exploration of the social, cultural, institutional, and historical narratives that have shaped our individual understanding of our experiences. Davies and Harré (1990) remind us “[i]t is the actual conversations which have already occurred that are the archetypes of current conversations” (p. 44), meaning that there is always a history woven into our understandings of our experiences. Experience is seen as transactional: “as a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social and material environment” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). This view of experience is crucial to the understanding of how narratives are formed and how narrative inquiry seeks to understand the formation of these narratives. Predicated on Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy of experience as both personal and social, “people are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals...they are always in relation, always in a social context” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4).

Pivotal to narrative inquiry is the concept of narrative, defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2008) as “the socially constructed forms of action, socially situated performances, ways of acting in and making sense of our world” (p. 46). The word “narrate” derives “from the Indo-European ‘gna’ which means both ‘to know’ and ‘to tell’” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001, p. xiii). This warrants some pondering as this ontological debate of *to know* and *to tell* is apparent within the literature on narrative inquiry. White (1987) contends that narrative “might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling” (p. 1). It is by telling stories that we relate to others our sense of reality which is the only reality we have come to *know*. This sentiment is best reflected by

Britzman's (2006) who states "what educates is not the person but the emotional experience of relating that becomes the basis for furthering meaning" (p. 166).

A key ontological assumption is that these narratives need to be treated as reality and not just as a by-product of it. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) clarify that "if the reality we seek to describe is presumed independent of our representations of it, then there is no need to tell a story of how our representations of the world emerged..." (p. 40). However, the goal for narrative inquiry is not to reproduce a representation of a reality independent of the knower; it is to generate a new understanding of that reality. Simply put, narrative inquirers record their unique account of what they learned about individuals' experiences, or what meanings individuals bring to their life experiences that, conceivably, could not be known through other theories or methods of inquiry. Epistemologically, narrative inquirers are largely involved in their research and in turn, they become a part of the storied experience (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; McCormack, 2004). A major component in the process is researchers' reconstructions of their own narrative histories, paying close attention to possible linkages and tensions of their histories with the narrative research undertaken (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). There is an assumption that both parties involved in the inquiry are influenced by their participation and will change because of their encounter; a change that is both inevitable and expected in this line of inquiry. As Pinnegar and Dayes (2007) posit,

We become narrative inquirers only when we recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship, primarily use stories as data and analysis, and understand the way in which what we know is embedded in a particular context, and finally that narrative of knowing is essential to our inquiry. (p. 7)

Unlike the impartial epistemological assumptions which assume the role of the researcher is objective to the research undertaken (e.g. positivism), narrative inquirers are largely involved in their research and in turn, they become a part of creating a new, co-constructed narrative. Capturing and making sense of conversation is a slippery thing for the most experienced researcher (Hollingsworth & Dybdah, 2007). The epistemological and ontological assumptions of narrative inquiry helped guide me in my understandings of the lived experience of teachers' collective reading experiences and their perceptions of how these experience influences their pedagogical practices.

Narrative Inquiry as a Pedagogical Tool

Literacy narratives have been claimed by many to be an effective practice for both preservice and inservice teachers as they reflect on their life experiences that have shaped their conceptions of literacy (Clark & Medina, 2000; Daisey, 2010; Hall, 2006; Hall, Johnson, Juzmik, Wortham, Mosley, 2010; Johnson, 2008; Kooy, 2003, 2006; Moje, 1996; Morawski & Gilbert, 2008). Narrative work enables teacher candidates to understand how their life experiences have shaped (and will continued to shape) their construction of literacy, informing their current and projected pedagogical practices. By confronting and working through their personal ideologies, these narratives have the potential to push teachers beyond the understanding of literacy and reading in terms of basal mechanics and allowed them to imagine issues of literacy, diversity and teaching in different ways (Clark & Medina, 2000; Johnson, 2008; Moje, 1996). By using both literacy narratives and book clubs in teacher education courses both Hall (2006) and Morawski & Gilbert (2008) found that teacher candidates were able to approach narratives and also counter narratives, both which shape the type of the teacher they wanted to become. These studies showcase how effective teacher narrative inquiry can be both in working through how

experiences inform teaching and potentially stretching conceptions of literacy, allowing for the possibility of change.

Daisey's (2010) work with memorable literacy teachers allowed for her teacher candidates to explore what they valued as reading in their own learning and consider possibilities for their future instruction. The repercussions of teachers and students harbouring conflicting notions of reading practices can be seen in Hall, Johnson, Juzmik, Wortham, Mosley's (2010) examination of teachers' storied experiences and how these worked to position themselves and their students in terms of literacy practices. Although the teachers and their respective students did not always share the same understandings about literacy conceptions, those held by the teachers were given prominence in the classrooms, therefore widening the gap between personal and school literacies. These aforementioned studies that extend narrative inquiry in teacher education demonstrate both the necessity for teachers to reflect on their experiences with reading and to work through potentially challenging assumptions about reading that inform their teaching practices.

Reader-Response Theory

It is noteworthy to explore the evolutionary path of those who played an integral role in popularizing this experiential approach to reading. David and Womack (2002) argue against the tendency to ignore the precursors of theories and urge scholars to embrace the exploration of the legacy of how such theoretical processors play roles in moving reading theories beyond the politics of interpretation. With this cautionary remark in mind, I attempt to piece together a brief chronological timeline—a reader-response spectrum as Louise Rosenblatt (1991) suggests—of assumptions about reading, literature and the relationship between reader and text that underscore current pedagogical ideologies. Like many theories, reader-response criticism/theory

is not a cohesive, conceptually unified critical position, but a perspective that branched out of a very structured way of looking at text and is associated with unpacking and investigating the reader, the reading process and the response (Tompkins, 1980) in academia. I focus on Louise Rosenblatt's contributions as her transactional approach to reading framed within reader-response theory is pivotal to this study.

A Brief History of Reader-Response Theory

Assumptions about reading have been the concern of philosophers for centuries and have occupied such notable ancient thinkers as Plato and Aristotle (Rosenblatt, 1991). Eagleton (1983) proposes that contemporary literary theory can be briefly conceptualized in three interlocking stages: Romanticism and the 19th century's preoccupation with the author; Formalism and the New Critic's exclusive concern with the text; and reader-response theory's shift of attention to the response of reader. Although marked differences exist within each group and the timeline is not as neatly separated as it can be by semi-colons, I find this conceptualization helpful in attempting to understand the theories that reader-response sought to both criticize and build upon. Moving beyond the notion of reading literature for the sole purpose of decoding the author's message or analyzing the text as a reflection of a system of societal beliefs, reader-response theory asserts the impossibility of a literary work existing as an autonomous entity until it is experienced by a reader. "Literary works do not exist on bookshelves: they are processes of signification materialized only in the practice of the reader." (p. 74). Just like a music note only comes to life when it is performed and experienced, a text "is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. ix). Further elaborated on by Bain, Beaty and Hunter (1995), "every musical performance, even of exactly the same notes, is somewhere different, a different interpretation so no two readers read or perform exactly the same work from

identical texts” (p. 1563). Arguably, the seed of reader-response theory was planted in the work of pragmatists such as Dewey and others alike in the early 20th century who argued for the experiential element in education. Despite these early contributions, the growing prominence of reader-response theories appears to be mainly within the last 50 years.

In terms of literature as a subject of study, only studies of Greek and Latin literatures were deemed proper in Western academia prior the late 19th century. Partly drawn from historical and biographical approaches to literature combined with aesthetic appreciation of art flowing from the Romantic period (1800-1850), the study of literature became an accepted and validated part of the university education curriculum at the dawn of the 20th century (Rosenblatt, 1991). During the 18th and 19th centuries, literature, defined as texts that embodied values and tastes of a particular (dominant) social class, was measured for the worth and indelibility by those privileged enough to partake in “literariness” (Eagleton, 1983), displaying a particular use of language. Seen as a literary work of art, the text was critiqued for its relation to and message from its author, and as a morally charged mechanism or propaganda. “The general assumption was that competent readers could interpret the text and agree on the author’s intended meaning, on ‘what the text meant’” (Eagleton, 1983 p. 57). Formalist ideology viewed literature as a particular organization of language: “a material fact, whose functioning could be analyzed rather as one would examine a machine” (Eagleton, 1983, p.3).

A group known as the New Critics reared their heads in the late 1920’s-30’s, arguing against the analysis of text as a reflection of both the author *and* social factors which they believed led to the demise of upholding literature as a literary work of art. Although the New Critics advocated for the value of attending to language in literature, they sought an impersonal, objective view of interpretation that required readers to bracket their subjective experiences

(Beach & Swiss, 2011). The form of the text became a more important object of study more so than the formalist preoccupation of the encoded ideas within the text. Shifting away from the author's message, the New Critics upheld the text as a form of art yet one that requires a formal structured, objective analysis and the concept of 'a close reading'—to learn and properly interpret the features of literature such as style, themes, etc.—was born (Beach & Swiss, 2011). This ideological stance of reading and literature resulted in pedagogical approaches that further positioned teachers-as-experts who expounded and analyzed the literary work, and students-as-vessels who acquired this knowledge by re-readings, recitations and examinations (Rosenblatt, 1991).

Despite some common assumptions held by the New Critics—the shift towards the text as art to be aesthetically appreciated by a formal analysis, dismissing a reader's response—the New Criticism movement is often characterized as a monolithic reading strategy yet is only one form or branch of formalism (Davis & Womack, 2002). As the case with any movement, those who are claimed to partake, notably T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards and Kenneth Burke, espoused marked differences in theories of reading and text but undertook a shift away from the emphasis on the biographical and social criticisms of literary works of art which occupied literary theorist of past generations. T.S. Eliot claimed the text to be sacred; a universal insight to restore much of the disarray resulting from war, depression and the decline in religion. I. A. Richards, argued by many to lay the groundwork for Rosenblatt's transactional theory, mapped the "difficulties" his students were having comprehending both the context and the meaning of a poem due their attempts to relate their emotions and experience to the text. Kenneth Burke called for different epistemologies and ontologies offered by other disciplines outside of literary theory, but was criticized for "polluting and diluting" the power of formalist thought (Davis & Womack, 2002).

However, such strategies as close readings, re-readings and stylistic analyzes put forth by the New Critics combined with reader-response approaches are still prevalent in many classrooms today (Applebee, 1993; Beach & Swiss, 2011).

Education in the 1920's and 30's was seen as necessary for nationalist growth in the Western world. Continuing early into the 1940's, an era described as the peak of the progressive education movement (Rosenblatt, 1991), education was largely influenced by the ingenuity of John Dewey's musings on the experiential necessity of education, meaning the value of the lived through experience, learning by doing, and students as active agents in their learning (Beach & Swiss, 2011; Dewey, 1933/1986). As applications of the New Critics tenants continued into the 1940's at the university level, aligning with the rigorous scientific/positivist approach which further validating the value of literature instruction alongside the growing prominence of the sciences and social sciences (Beach & Swiss, 2011), the development of reader-response theory and other finds its roots in the auspices of the New Criticism.

Influences of Russian formalism were significant and formative with concepts such as *ostraneni*—the ability of art to make the familiar seem strange, forcing us to reconceptualize our relationship with ordinariness of the world (Davis & Womack, 2002). Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) distinguishes between monologic and dialogic literary texts; the former as a single voiced work representing the dominant ideology of the author's culture and the latter allows for multiple voices and alternative stances to emerge and engage in dialogue with one another. Further, dialogic theories have the potential to create tensions and contradictions, leading to multiple interpretations and different readings of the same text (Beach & Swiss, 2011; David & Womack, 2002).

Fuelled by the evolving culture of the 1960's, with a heightened sense of literature as nationalist propaganda, *alternative* views towards literary theory began to emerge in academia, which Rosenblatt (1978, 1982) ingeniously calls the “reader-response spectrum.” Critics of formalism and the New Critics argue that locating the meaning of text fails to consider individual differences of readers’ knowledges, beliefs and purpose of their responses (Beach & Swiss, 2011). The notion of the reader actively participating in the creation of meaning called for a reconceptualization of meaning and the aims and methods of literary study (Tompkins, 1980). Although impossible to detail all of the theoretical positions that have emerged in the last three decades of the twentieth century sparked by this redefinition of meaning and literature, the following theorists offer noteworthy underpinnings of reader-response theory resulting in pedagogical implications that are significant to any study seeking to understand how individuals engage with text.

Growing out of post-structuralist notions against inherent meaning in text and literary theories that focus attention on the author and content, reader-response offers a lens that focuses on the reader’s experience with text. Post-structuralism as a destabilizing theory, stipulates that there are no fixed signs or meanings in text; it is the ambiguous and unstable movement of the reader’s subjectivity that creates meaning (Fish, 1980). Advocating against the traditional notion of the passive reader, Louis Rosenblatt (1938/1995, 1978) proposed a transactional theory of reading. Although the movement of reader-response theory is most often agreed to have been mobilized during the latter half of the twentieth century, Rosenblatt’s earlier writings have been argued to signify the first claims of the reader-response approach (Tompkins, 1980). She argues that the reader is actively involved in creating meaning by building on past experiences.

Borrowing Dewey’s notions of transaction to emphasize the contribution of both reader

and text, Rosenblatt (1978) sees reading as an active, two-way process lived through during the relationship between the text and reader at a particular time, under particular circumstances. The reader's background knowledge brings meaning to the symbols on the page and the text guides the reader's meaning making through its structure.

The words in their particular patterns stir up elements of memory, activate areas of consciousness. The reader, bringing past experience of language and of the world to the task, sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl. If the subsequent words do not fit into the framework, it may have to be revised, thus opening up new and further possibilities for the text that follows. This implies a constant series of selections from the multiple possibilities offered by the text and their synthesis into an organized meaning. (1982, p. 268)

This notion dispels the myth that there is one linear, 'true' reading of any particular text, challenging the formalist concept of the *close reading*. She also distinguishes between efferent and aesthetic readings or stances that reader's take when reading. Efferent reading is concerned with what the reader will take away after the reading event has occurred and is disassociated with the text in a way that "things are pondered but not [necessarily] aesthetically focused" (1978, p. 24). The reader will narrow her attention to build up meanings to be retained. Aesthetic reading is concerned with what happens during the reading event: the "associations, attitudes, feelings and ideas that words and their referents arose within the reader" (p. 24). Here, the reader's attention is on what is being lived through during the relationship with the text, drawing on past knowledges, encounters written or spoken texts and sounds of words. "We lend our sensations, our emotions, our sense of being alive to the new experience which, we feel, corresponds to the

text. We participate in the story we identify with the characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings” (1982, p. 70).

The same text can be read both efferently and aesthetically and each reader will have a unique transaction with a particular reading event. What is of importance to Rosenblatt (1982) is the choice of what is being sought early on in reading event. In most readings, there are two streams that occur; one of the choices and syntheses that we use to construct meaning and one of accompanying reaction to the very meaning that is being constructed. Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1978) challenges the popular assumptions that readers live vicariously through literary works. Instead, she posits that this is a unique mode of experience where the “boundary on inner and outer world breaks down and the literacy work of art...leads us to a new world” (p. 21). This new world can be perceived as a new way of knowing, new possibilities that may not otherwise have been imagined, as reading has the capacity to “enable the reader to transcend personal limitations, whether of temperament, sex, race or culture” (p. 142) and help us understand ourselves and others. As previously discussed, our sense of self comes largely from the opposition of ‘other’ from the external world. Books can “provide us with a widely broadened ‘other’ through which we define ourselves and our world” (p. 145). Echoed by Grumet (2006), books can function as mediator between the relationship of self and other. If engaging with literature helps us to expand and widen our horizons of the traditional, dichotomous view of knowing the self only in opposition to the other, then reading has the potential to allow us to develop new understandings and new ways of reading the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Rosenblatt’s transactional approach to reading can be seen as illuminating the ideas of Iser (1978) and Fish (1980) and made relevant to reading practices in schools (Clifford, 1991).

Wolfgang Iser (1978) furthers the reading process in terms of a convergence between text and reader, bringing the literary work into existence. For Iser, each literary work has an artistic side created by the author and an aesthetic side accomplished by the reader. The fusion between writer and reader, known as *konkretisation*, requires the text to engage the imagination of the reader while requiring the reader to fill in the gaps to produce meaning, resulting in a different reading for each individual. These concepts can be argued to be influenced by Barthes' (1977) earlier musings on the death of the author in attempt to make the reader no longer a consumer of text, searching for meaning within a story, but rather an active producer of meaning. Somewhat aligning with Rosenblatt, Iser believes that the aesthetic response of reading brings into play the imaginative and perceptive capacities of the reader (Davis & Womack, 2002). Further, Iser claims that an aesthetic response is a relationship between text, reader and their interaction (Iser, 1978) which sounds more like transactional theory than interpretation as received by the reader from the text. The notions of *konkretisation* or filling in the gaps has allowed me to pay attention to how participants read certain texts and how they potentially use the book club as a space to collectively fill in the gaps absent in their daily lives.

Stanley Fish (1980) sees reading as a fundamentally fragmented process, underscoring the reader-response theory's assertion that the reader must struggle to produce meaning. The revolutionary concept of 'the interpretative text' is predicated on Derrida's (1978) notion that signifiers (e.g. words) only have identity in their difference or relation from one another. For Fish, the interpretative text is unstable and dependent upon each reader's subjective experience located in an 'interpretive community' which are equally unstable bodies that shift over time. This community constitutes or enables a distinct epistemology in how one comes to *know* in agreed upon social constructions of a temporal reality. These interpretive communities "exist

prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around” (Fish, 1980, p. 14). Fish further posits that communication occurs only within a system of common meanings, or intelligibility, and is always contextualized, even if not explicitly stated and concludes, “[t]here is no way to ever limit, or isolate interpretation” (p. 321). Fish’s ideological aim is to see textual instability more of a virtue and less as a theoretical constraint (Tompkins, 1980).

The notion of interpretive communities is somewhat controversial even to Fish himself, who is noted to wrestle with his own theoretical postulations (Tompkins, 1980). However, the example that Fish (1980) provides in the first chapter of *Is there a text in this class?* illustrates the provocations that notions such as interpretive communities and systems of intelligibility offer reader-response theory. On the first day of the semester, a student, formerly taught by Fish himself, asks the professor “Is there a text in this class?” The professor understands this as a question regarding assigned readings and replies, “Yes, it’s the *Norton Anthology of Literature.*” The student responds “No, no....I mean in this class do we believe in poems and things or is it just us?” (Fish, 1980, p. 305), posing an epistemological question about the instability of text and unobtainability of determined meanings versus the materiality of a course text. Fish concludes that the professor can only adjust his understanding of the student’s question once it is read within the same system of intelligibility. Readers create meaning as an event of reading utilizing interpretative strategies from their changing and potential divergent interpretive communities. Graff (1999) argues the problem or controversy arises in our ability (or lack thereof) to know where one system of intelligibility or interpretive communities ends and another begins without “messy overlap” and these distinctions are impossible. Texts don’t change but the way they are being written and read change across the temporal spectrum.

Although Fish's theoretical underpinnings are noteworthy to reader-response theory, he also problematizes the efficacy of theory to impact the lives of those outside of the confines of academia. He grapples with the limitations of theory and "the language games that undermine its capacity to influence any forum outside of the narrow interpretative communities in scholarship" (Davis & Womack, 2002, p. 87). I appreciate the admittance of such struggles as I, myself, wrestle with the musings of theorists, many of whom seem only to write and publish for a targeted audience of their colleagues operating within the same systems of intelligibility. Although the writing of this thesis is within a system of intelligibility, I hope to both unpack some of the common meanings that academia accredits as well as steer away from a pedantic and esoteric writing style. While Fish's concepts are notably contentious, the notions of interpretive texts, interpretative communities, and shared systems of understanding helped me to frame my research of book club members' experiences in their social and cultural constructions of individual and collective meaning.

It is worthy to note that neither Rosenblatt nor transactional theory is mentioned in Terry Eagleton's (1983) *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, yet the contributions of Barthes (1975), Iser (1978) and Fish (1980) to reader-response theory are thoughtfully explored. Rosenblatt has been influential in the field of education as many researchers have extended her transactional reading theory. Invoking both efferent and aesthetic readings of texts, Morawski and Gilbert's (2008) work with undergraduate students' responses to a text found that readers experienced both aesthetic and efferent readings which allowed the students "to reach a more meaningful understanding of the complexities of life negotiated both within and outside of the school walls" (p. 4). Students felt that the discussions were not only enjoyable but allowed them to expand and deepen their repertoire of responses to the text and acted as "an invaluable means by which they

acquired relevant subject knowledge” (p. 12) as “they wove together layers of transactional conversations” (p. 7). Similarly, Strong-Wilson’s (2006) inquiry into the significance of pre-service teachers’ reflections on their literacy histories sheds light on the ‘touchstones’ that become nested in literacy autobiographies. Strong-Wilson argues that Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory can be used to frame pre-service teachers’ earliest encounters with literature and appreciate the emotional significance that these touchstones have on informing one’s literacy pedagogical practices. Touchstones can take on new and nested levels of meaning (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007) as teachers re-visit these as relational teaching and learning stories. Twomey (2007) further argues that reader-response has informed literacy educators that reading, writing, and other forms of cultural texts can create pathways for social change. Twomey concludes that using book club practices in her classroom “opens up possibilities for teachers to think in new ways about structuring the classroom within a reading club pedagogy to foster active, political participation in the public sphere of education and engage students’ social contexts, personal histories, and multiple subjectivities” (p. 406). Rosenblatt would agree, arguing in terms of a transactional theory of reading that “to develop a capacity of such activities is the aim of the teaching of reading and literature” (1982, p. 270).

I use the aforementioned studies that extend reader-response theory, specifically Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1982) transactional approach to reading, as guides in understanding how teachers in book clubs narrate their experiences by transacting with text and create meaning from the chosen texts they read. Belatedly, Rosenblatt is recognized as a pioneer in the field of reader-response. A generation ahead of her time, her published works guide progressive teachers frustrated with the rigidity and remoteness of how reading can be approached in school. Concerned with enfranchising readers of all abilities, Rosenblatt urges teachers to reflect on the

influences that have shaped their past, present and future reading experiences in order to realize the transformative potential of reading and foster critical readers in classrooms. Rosenblatt's pedagogical goal was—and arguably still is—is to create “readers who might choose, citizens who might act, and teachers who might empower” (Clifford, 1991, p. 4). A transactional approach to reading connects the emotional, the personal and the intellectual; it allows us to enter into the world of the text by dialoguing with our experiences, create meaning, and imagine alternate possibilities that disrupt deeply held notions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explores the main components of my theoretical framework which I used to understand the pedagogical implications of teachers' experiences in book clubs. More specifically, notions of knowledge as individually and socially produced as we transact with our surroundings, understandings of lived experiences from those who live them, and experience as the main driver of inquiry are main components that I draw from social constructivism. Narrative inquiry allows for the collaboration of co-constructed narratives by researcher and participants by which I view my data. Further, narrative inquiry pushes individuals (specifically teachers in this case) to explore how meaning is created through their stories which, in turn, shape and inform their teaching practices. Transactional reader-response theory positions readers as active agents, allows for multiple perspectives, connections and transactions with text, and is concerned with the continuum of aesthetic and efferent stances by which readers approach text to create meanings and understandings. The alignment of these three distinct theoretical perspectives helped me to create a lens to view my data, analysis and findings of this study as I searched for ways in which my participants transact with their surroundings, experience reading, and approach text in our co-constructed narratives.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology that informed the methods I employed to explore teachers' experiences of book club readership. Due to the breadth and complexity of my research questions, a multifaceted approach that respects the integrity of the participants in the study is warranted. As stressed by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research "is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...involv[ing] an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world...attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3) and is inherently multimethod in focus. It is an arena where the reflexivity of the researcher's feelings, voices and assumptions not only frame the entire research process, but are vital to a successful effort to consciously maintain the interpretive nature of the project as a whole. The conceptual and practical challenges in my attempts to understand the negotiations and relationships of self, identity and subjectivity, found in the collective reading experience, demands a methodological perspective that is complex, holistic and integrative (Creswell, 2007).

Research Design

Qualitative research is concerned with how individuals experience, interpret and understand the complexities of a sociocultural world, in a particular social and temporal context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Patton, 1990). I concur with Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) that narrative inquiry "remains an unfinished and unfinishable business" (p. 375). Methodologically, narrative inquiry offers a way to bring forth stories of teacher practice, perception and reflection. Further, narrative inquiry investigates how narratives are formed, shaped, and read in the context they occur and how these stories influence and shape teacher knowledge and practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kooy, 2006). However, stories "don't fall from the sky; they are composed and

received in contexts, . . . social artifacts telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or a group” (Riessman, 2008, p. 105).

I am drawn to narrative inquiry for its credence “of interdisciplinary analytical lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (Chase, 2008, p. 651). The notion of particulars is extended by Butler-Kisber, (2010) to emphasize the particularizability (Donmoyer, 1990) rather than the generalizability of research. That is,

sharing in great detail the complexities and nuances of something being studied has as much, or even greater value for understanding and contributing to change than ‘generalizing.’ In fact, narrative researchers question whether anything can truly be generalized when context plays such an important role in understanding. (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 64)

With this in mind, I chose data collection methods which would allow participants to share the particulars that Chase and Butler-Kisber refer to in a variety of ways, enabling me to gain understandings of how they position themselves as readers, book club members and teachers. In-depth and rich descriptions of meaning making processes which participants’ grapple with, in regards to their individual and collective identities, can only be attained through the complexity of a qualitative research design. I looked for continuity in experiences—past, present, and future, and how this continuity relates to the contextual dimensions of the research (Butler-Kisber, 2010). For these reasons, I chose to employ five data collection methods to answer the following research questions that guide my study,

1. Why do teachers join the book club?
2. In what ways do teachers use book clubs to negotiate meanings of text?

- a) What knowledge do teachers recognize as being created and valued within the book club?
 - b) What does it mean to read collectively and what do teachers gain from it?
3. How do experiences in a book club influence teachers' classroom pedagogy?
- a) What are the tensions between classroom literacy practices and teachers' personal literacy practices?
 - b) In what ways does book club practice enter into the classroom (if at all)?
4. In what ways do teachers negotiate aspects of their teaching identities and subjectivities in book club discussions?

Research Participants

Initially, I proposed to work with eight to twelve participants, with the criteria that they are currently teaching in an Ontario publicly-funded schools and belong to an English speaking book club. I sought my participants through personal contacts, as many of my colleagues are teachers. In addition, I posted advertisements of my proposed research project in variety of sites—an on-line teachers' forum; electronic classifieds and forums (*Craigslist* and *Kijiji*), and on an announcement board at a local library. Despite my advertising efforts, all participants were recruited through personal contacts (although my on-line advertisements received over 200 “hits”). During this recruitment phase of the study, I hoped that this project would be attractive to teachers because of its potential crossover to literacy practices in the classroom. I believed participants would benefit from this research as our discussions would surround their perceptive links between their collective reading experience and pedagogical practices. This link could lead to more actively engaged literacy activities in participants' respective classrooms as well as personal insight into their collective and individual reading and meaning making practices. I also

offered each participant a 25\$ gift certificate to a local bookstore as a token of my appreciation for participating in the study. With one exception, I was not acquainted with the participants prior to the study. One participant (Helen) is the mother of a friend of mine, whom I had briefly met on one prior occasion.

In total, thirteen teachers expressed interested in the study and, under the advice of my supervisor, I worked with all of them. My criteria for selecting candidates shifted slightly as two participants are teaching at privately funded schools, one of which had also formerly belonged to a book club that was no longer in operation. After discussion with my supervisor regarding the confines of my criteria and in light of maintaining an open mind as that of a qualitative researcher, I decided to continue to work with these participants. I also felt that by including these participants with different teaching backgrounds added breath to the demographics of my research sample. Furthermore, I felt it necessary to include participants who were enthusiastic about the purpose of my research and therefore most likely take an active interest in exploring their book club experiences.

The data collection phase lasted from October, 2012 to June, 2013. This timeframe was longer than I anticipated but necessary to accommodate the busy lives of teachers, particularly surrounding school holidays (i.e. winter holiday and March break). I began each encounter with an informal email, introducing myself and the parameters of my proposed research, followed by a letter of introduction (see Appendix A). The data collection methods that I employed were a) demographically based questionnaires b) in-depth open-ended interviews c) participants' written reading interest profiles d) a contextual experience⁹ of book club meetings e) textual analysis on books read during my experience of book club meetings and f) a research journal of

⁹ I am hesitant to use the term 'participant observation' and have found 'contextual experience' to better align with my theoretical framework.

my reflections and experiences during the research process. By allowing my research questions to intersect and merge with my data collection methods, a supply of rich data emerged through co-constructed narratives.

Unpacking Data Collection Methods

I attempted to ease the formality that is inevitable when conducting research by entering into each dialogue embodying the role of a researcher co-creating narratives with my participants. I will now unpack each method I employed to collect data in attempts to paint a comprehensive picture of how I approached this study. The use of multiple methods is critical in obtaining in-depth, understandings of teachers' experiences in book clubs and link to pedagogical practices, adding rigor, depth and breadth to the study (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I will then introduce the participants and share excerpts from the raw data by first explaining how the data came to be.

Questionnaires

I offered the demographically-based questionnaire to gain a sense of the individuals' backgrounds; education, current teaching roles and the logistics of their experiences in book clubs [see Appendix G]. Initially, I contemplated whether to administer the questionnaire at the beginning or the end of the interview but after the first interview, I felt that starting with the questionnaire created an entry point for me to proceed with the interview. Logistically, I found it appealing to ascertain the demographic information needed and move beyond the formality of one-word answers and ticked boxes. I often referred back to this questionnaire during the interview to guide me into further probes such as years of experiences, current grade levels and multiple memberships to book clubs. In previous research projects that I have been involved in, some individuals have expressed hesitation or unease at such demographic questions as age.

However, other than a casual laugh, none of the participants voiced any hesitancy in answering any part of the questionnaire.

In-depth Open Ended Interviews

Fontana and Frey (2000) posit that interviews act as negotiated texts created by researcher and participant. Arguably, the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of people and the meaning they make of that experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As it is important to establish a good rapport with the participants, I strived to create an arena where my participants could speak freely and justly about their lived experiences. The open-ended, semi-structured interviews allowed me to investigate people's views of reality, while simultaneously maximizing the participants' active involvement in the construction of their stories, the existence of which further gives the participants agency/authority in the research process. By providing a casual conversation style, rich in description, the interview space was one where multiple realities and voices could be both heard and respected (Reinharz & Chase, 2002). Thinking of the participants as narrators allows for the shift away from the idea that questions are merely answered and towards the notion that interviews are narratives with stories to tell. That said, bearing Atkinson and Silverman's (1997) cautionary claim to avoid the romantic pitfalls of positioning interviews as "the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another" (p. 305), I am reminded that narratives are always socially constructed and mediated. Aligning with the tenants of narrative inquiry, I treat these narratives as social situated and produced in this particular setting and shaped by the interaction between the participants and myself as the researcher (Chase, 2008).

Guided by these principles, I conducted one open-ended interview (which lasted approximately 30-90 minutes in length, slightly longer than expected as stated in the appendices)

with each participant [see Appendix H]. This interview protocol was gleaned (and collaboratively developed) from my master's research project and adapted to suit the specific context of this study. Interviews occurred in a meeting place of the participants' choice; coffee shops, homes or schools. One occurred in a cozy corner of a *Chapters* bookstore due to the spacing limits at the nearest coffee shop. Eleven interviews were done face to face, one via Skype, and one via telephone due to technical difficulties with Skype. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by me. Further, I emailed each participant a copy of the interview transcript, asking if there were any changes to be made. I felt this participant check to be an important step in further authenticating both their voices and agency within the project. Moreover, this ongoing negotiation of access and consent highlights the importance of the researcher-participant relationship (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Reading Interest Profile

I asked participants to construct a reading interest profile (RP) in order for me to gain an understanding of their past and current reading experience. I believe that some memories and interests are easier to write and personally, sometimes words can flow easier from my fingers than answering questions during an interview. This reading interest profile acts as another “textual ground for people to retell their lived experiences” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 478) and helped me to both create a narrative profile for each participant, and to understand the participants reading experiences. Drawn from the work of Daisey (2010), Morawski (1989, 1993, 2008) and Morawski & Brunhuber, (1993, 1995), I created eight questions intended to guide participants written reflections (see Appendix I for guiding questions). I stressed this was intended to be a reflective exercise and encouraged participants to use whatever format they desired (i.e. journal entry, response to each question, a letter, etc.). Following the interview, I

emailed the RP to each participant and asked that the form be completed and returned at the earliest convenience. Initially, I proposed for participants to complete the reading interest profile prior to the interview to help me to gain a sense of one's reading experience, further guiding me to probe into each participant's specific interest as reader. As Ellis and Bochner (2000) purport "the mode of storytelling is akin to the novel or biography...[and] repositions the reader as a coparticipant in dialogue and thus rejects the orthodox view of the reader as a passive receiver of knowledge" (p. 744). However, I found it easier to explain the RP following the interview, and felt that participants would feel more comfortable disclosing reading backgrounds after we met. Participants then emailed these profiles to me at a later date of their convenience. As expected, some RPs were more in-depth than others but all contained vital information that I would not necessary have learned during interviews. Most chose to use the guiding questions that I provided and were written in a journal-type manner. When necessary, I emailed participants for clarification on particularities that were written and each email was responded to in a timely manner.

Contextual Experience of Book Club Meetings

I intended to attend at least three meetings of three different book clubs in order to further my understandings of these intimate and provocative spaces. Luckily, I was invited to three separate meetings by Anne, Diana and Lydia, following their respective interviews. Participants first checked with members of their club to ensure my attendance was permitted and sent an email to verify that I was invited by the group. I then sent an informal email, briefly describing the project, to participants to be forwarded to the rest of the members (see Appendix F), ensuring that I would not be audio recording during the meetings. Further, I took photographs of the

setting in attempts to capture the essence of the meetings but ensured that members themselves would not be photographed (see Appendix E).

Prior to the meetings, I read the book club selection and participated as much as I could as invited guest in this privileged space. I was careful to follow the perceived etiquette of each club and participated in the conversation as *naturally* as possible, refraining from making my presence the dominant discussion of the night. Inevitably, my project of study arose in conversation but this occurred either at the beginning or nearing the end of the meeting. Some members were very intrigued by the project and I answered any questions they had to the best of my knowledge at the time. I refrained from taking detailed notes during these meeting as I felt it would be inappropriate and further enhance the unwelcomed image



of a scientific researcher. After each meeting, I would rush home and create reconstructions from my brief notes and photographs taken, paying particular attention to dynamics, practices and dialogue about the chosen book. At the end of each meeting, I was welcomed to attend future meeting and given an “honorary” membership to all three clubs. One club in particular added me to their private online site, by which I still receive a monthly invite to their meetings. Although I was acutely aware that my presence at these meetings could be cast as an outsider and a researcher, I was reminded of the narrative inquiry lens that treats narrative as socially situated performances “produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes” (Chase, 2008, p. 657). Put another way, I was not concerned with how my presence altered the discussion because I was treating the entire meeting as a new, co-created event in which I was actively involved.

I was, admittedly, surprised how casually I was welcomed into the three meetings, both by the participants and members of the respective clubs. As previously stated, although well aware of the eminent effect my presence has on the discussion, I was grateful that my attendance was embraced. These meetings were filled with a truly immeasurable amount of discussion, ranging from highly focused analysis of the texts, to intertextual comparisons, historical accounts, author profiles, childhood stories, personal histories, questions, concerns and an abundance of laughter. It is without question that my presence affected the group's dynamics; however, the broad range of topical discussion is noteworthy as the salient relationship between researcher and participants is an important aspect of the horizon of meaning making within this project. These unpredictable opportunities of sharing textual responses with three different book clubs allowed me to explore a variety of practices, protocols, in attempts to understand both subtle and overt ways in which members use the book club to negotiate meaning through transacting within this exclusive community of readers. I expand on the details of these meetings in the next section following the textual analysis.

Intertextual and Narrative Analysis of Texts

Adhering to Wolfreys (2004) suggestion to “be attentive to the ways in which the text is articulated, the ways in which it appears to articulate itself and the ways in which it appears to be silent on matter” (p. 213), I created an intertextual and narrative analysis of the chosen texts, entitled *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Skloot, 2010), *Asylum*, (McGrath, 1996) and *Prisoner of Tehran: A Memoir* (Nemat, 2007). More specifically, I focused on these questions: what is the story about (e.g. plot, setting, characters), how and why was this book chosen by the club? How do the themes in the texts relate to the book club discussion? How did I respond to the text during the reading event? Further guided by the narrative analysis work of Riesmann

(2005), these probes assisted me to being alert to the ways in which the participants may attribute importance and cultural meaning to the chosen books.

Researcher's Journal

I believe that this may be the most important aspect of my research and inevitably influenced the previous five forms of data collection. I kept a researcher journal in the form of both a hardcopy and an electronic notebook. I wrote my first entry on October 12, 2013, following my first interview. I logged my thoughts and observations about the context of the research throughout the entire process. These notes were later used to augment hunches that I developed about how the book club space is used to produce meaning and ultimately influence pedagogical practice. The concept of bringing and creating the self in the field (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Reinharz, 2010) is a prominent theme in qualitative research studies that seeks to not only acknowledge the role of the researcher, but to illuminate this role as the foundation of the study itself through the process of self-reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the “human instrument” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 210) “must examine carefully what she brings to and contributes to the process” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 65). It is the conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself. Embodying Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) notion of the interpretive *bricoleur* as one who “produces a bricolage—that is, a pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (p. 4) allowed me to literally piece together the narratives of myself and the participants to create a new set of situated knowledges. A bricolage changes and takes new forms “as the bricoleur adds different tools, methods and techniques of representation and interpretation to the puzzle” (p. 4). Creswell (2007) emphasizes the importance of maintaining descriptive and reflective notes as

both are essential in adding to the richness and details of qualitative research in learning about peoples' lived experiences. Within the qualitative research paradigm, self-reflexivity is both acknowledged and accepted and therefore, positioning myself within my research is essential in authenticating the knowledges of those who shared with me their texts, interpretations and experiences of meaning making.

Analysis and Re/presenting the Data

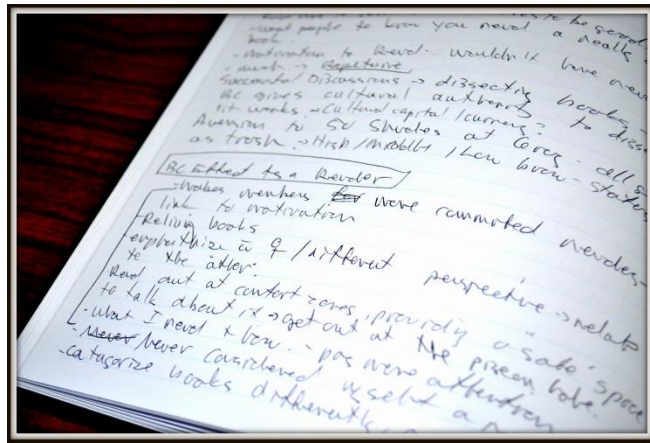
Making sense of conversation is a slippery thing for the most experienced researcher (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; McCormack, 2004). Bearing this cautionary claim in mind, the research method of data interpretation that I used was thematic narrative analysis (Riesmann, 2008) which included rigorous readings of interview transcripts, reading interest profiles, my notes from the book club meetings and my researcher's journal. Using *NVivo*, a qualitative data analysis program that I have been using for nearly four years, I identified patterned themes that stretch across the data with careful consideration of preserving the wealth of detail (Riesmann, 2008). Guided by principles gleaned from narrative inquiry, reader-response and social constructivism, I was attentive to the ways in which the teachers detailed their experiences of reading with a book club, from the minute details on which night of the week the meetings occur to the larger questions of exploring their perceptions of links to their classroom pedagogy. In addition, an interpretive method facilitates self-reflexivity (Reinharz, 2010) and I took into account my interest in these issues as I straddled the roles of teacher, book club member, and researcher. My researcher's journal kept a record of my intersubjective recognition throughout the research process. I paid close attention to the tensions and intersections of my reflections and memories invoked as I listen to participants' narratives.

Identifying common thematic elements across research participants, carefully attending to the events and histories discussed has a long standing history in qualitative research (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Chase, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Patton; 1990; Riessman, 2008). Continuing this deep-rooted tradition requires subtle shifts in terms of the commonalities researchers seek to find across the data, in order to preserve the assumptions of narrative inquiry and in turn, narrative analysis. In general, narrative analysis is “a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Like any family, narrative analysis has tensions and conflicts among its members, but there is an agreement that “particular histories of individuals are preserved, resulting in an accumulation of details that is assembled into a “fuller” picture of the individual or group” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11).

I chose thematic narrative analysis as I felt it was the best way to organize the data produced from the participants. According to Riessman (2008), thematic narrative analysis allows for a researcher to exclusively focus on content, paying attention to what is being said rather than the how (as in structural analysis). Participants’ spoken and written narratives are treated as cases and the analysis strives to remain case-centered by using long sequences of quotes in attempt to keep the story intact. Theoretical concepts are employed a priori in the analysis process while also allowing for the searching of insights. Time and place are taken into account which aligns nicely with temporality and positionality (along with personal and social) required in narrative inquiry. What I find missing in thematic narrative analysis is acknowledging the researcher’s role in creating the narrative, which is a large part of this research. In order to explore this dimension and add to the multiplicity of analytical lenses, I also draw on dialogic analysis, which requires “attention to the influence of the investigator, setting

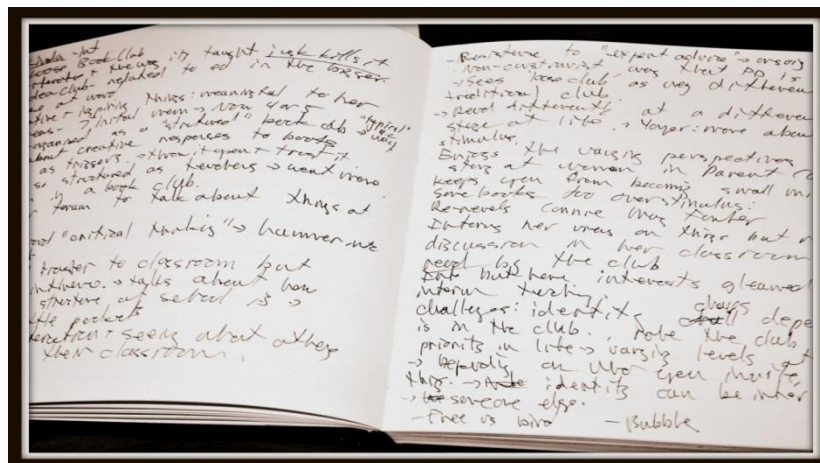
and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of the narrative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 105).

Approaching the data with Bogdan & Biklen’s (2007) notion of the researcher engaged as “part of the dialogue we are trying to consider” (p. 178), I entered into a dialogue with my data. We talked, we laughed, we fought, we cried, we took breaks, and finally reconciled. Embodying



Creswell’s (2007) analogy of an upward spiral, I worked through the analysis as a continuous flow of organizing, reading, re-reading, reflecting, comparing and interpreting. My analysis was essentially a layered process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Here, I borrow Butler-Kisber’s (2010) notions of coarse-grained and fine-grained phases of analyses to help explain how I organized the data. The coarse ground phase involved immersing myself with the data: multiple re-readings of field texts, dialoging with the data, shaping the data into broad categories, and finding connections within each participant’s “case”. Using the interview protocol as a skeleton, I created initial codes—known in *Nvivo* language as nodes—and organized the interview transcripts and reading interest profiles into these codes [see Appendix J]. The coding process fragments the data into categories, forcing me to carefully pay attention to detailed descriptions whilst maintaining the context; an essential tenant of narrative inquiry. I searched for patterns and connections that stretched within these initial codes as well as particularities, oddities and silences unique to each participant. I noted when I was surprised to learn something or, alternatively, felt like I closely related to the participants’ stories. Moving into the fine-grained

phases, I then compared connecting threads across the codes, which lead to creation of new, refined codes representing themes that stretched across the participants' narratives. Against the backdrop of social constructivism, reader-response, and narrative inquiry, I searched for discussion about what individual and collective reading means to the participants, aesthetic and efferent transactions with text, and how participants perceive their book club experiences to influence their teaching practices. I connected participants' early recollections of reading to their present day reading experiences, paying attention to the relationships revealed within and across each case. I created a visual diagram of themes which I then cross referenced with my research questions [See Appendix K]. Finally, I situated my findings with respect to issues raised in previous studies and the broader literature on book clubs and both teachers' and students' reading practices. This layered process was interlocked and iterative, like "an accordion-like approach" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 31) as I worked through my interpretive understandings of the data, reflecting on the literature and using my theoretical framework as a lens to make sense of the participants' narratives. In terms of the quantity of data I gathered, it totaled 13 demographically based questionnaires, 118 pages of interview transcription, 22 pages of reading interest profiles, approximately 100 pages of journal writing and analytic memos (both hardcopy and electronic versions), all of which I read and reread throughout this process. All photographs used in this thesis have been taken by me (unless otherwise referenced), seen both as illustrations to support my findings (Collier, 1957) and as forms of storytelling (Harrison, 2002).



Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the research methods I employed to explore my participants' experiences of book club membership and how these experience influence their teaching practices. My methodology is informed by my theoretical framework, particularly such notions of knowledge and meaning, both individually and social produced, ideas as the main driver of inquiry, narratives as co-constructed, and readers as active agents with transactional approaches to text. Guided by the work on Riesmann (2005, 2008) and Butler-Kisber (2010), I chose thematic narrative analysis to organize and represent my data and also borrowed from dialogic analysis which adds the dimension of the researcher's influence on the production of narratives.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES: THE READING TEACHERS

“We read to know we are not alone.”

(C.S. Lewis, *C.S. Lewis: Life Works and Legacy*)

“Books are uniquely portable magic.”

(Stephen King, author of *The Stand*)

Here, I introduce the participants as seen through my eyes and through the vehicle of their own self-representation. I give a brief overview of the participants' demographics as a way to situate my purposive sampling group. I profile each individual, providing a context of the interview and offer my narrative reflections on the experience with each discussion ensued. I also provide an excerpt from each participant's Reading Interest Profile (RP) to uphold the tenants of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and allow for the teachers to speak in their own voice about their reading experiences. I present the participants alphabetically using pseudonyms¹⁰. I offered participants the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym but only Kathleen chose to do so. For the remaining twelve participants, I chose classic literary characters. Although all participants were recruited through word of mouth as many of my friends and colleagues are teachers, I was not acquainted with any participants except for one (Helen) prior to the study. Admittedly, I openly discussed my doctoral work at any opportune event or social function where I felt a potential participant could be found: in the shadows of a cheese table, chip bowl or pizza platter at any social gathering I attended in the past year. Through this recruitment process, I have become much more confident and concise in describing my research as I literally accosted most people in my life (and some random strangers) to seek out willing participants. Although I resisted this process in the beginning, feeling more like a

¹⁰ Although I changed the names of the participants, my consent from approved by the University of Ottawa acknowledges that complete anonymity in published results cannot be assured due to the intimate nature of book clubs as members are well known to each already in advance of the study

vacuum salesperson than a doctoral candidate, I was soon able to shed the sales persona and embody the researcher identity that I needed to embrace.

I had the pleasure of working with 13 teachers, K-12, who belong or have recently belonged to an active book club as a separate entity from school¹¹. Participants' ages range from 27-60 years, twelve are female and one is male. Eight teach at the primary junior level (K- Grade 8) and five participants teach at the senior high school level (Grade 9-12). English is the language commonly spoken at home, with one participant who also speaks French. Not surprisingly, all have Bachelor of Education degrees, with four attaining Master's degrees. Years of teaching experience range from 3-32 years, and all but one, who is currently a vice-principal, teaches in a classroom in an Ontario school. Years of book club membership ranges from 2 to 18 years. Corresponding to larger scale studies on book clubs conducted by Long (2003) and Sedo (2004), the age diversity within each club is minimal. Eleven of the participants reside in Ottawa and two live in Toronto. Ten of the participants belong to one book club while three have belonged to or currently belong to more than one club. These demographics are summarized in the chart below.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Language	Highest Degree Held	OCT Qualifications	Panel	Years of Teaching Experience	Years in club	# BC
Anne	39	F	E	M	P/J/I/S	S	7	4	1
Charlotte	40	F	E	B ed	J/I/S	S	8	4	1
Diana	48	F	E	B ed	P/J	E	9	10	2
Emma	44	F	E	B ed	P/J/I/S	E	21	12	2
Grace	50	F	E	B ed	J/I/S	S	25	17	1
Helen	60	F	E	MA	S	S	20	15	1
Isabella	51	F	E	B ed	P/J/I/S	P/J	17	2	1
James	46	M	E	B ed	J/I/S	J	23	6	1
Lydia	27	F	E/F	B Ed	I/S	J/S	3	2	1
Rose	57	F	E	B ed	P/J	K	32	18	1
Maria	43	F	E	M Ed	P/J	P/J	10	3	1
Sophia	60	F	E	B ed	J/I/S	S	15	2	1
Kathleen	55	F	E	MA	P/J/I/S	J	28	10	2

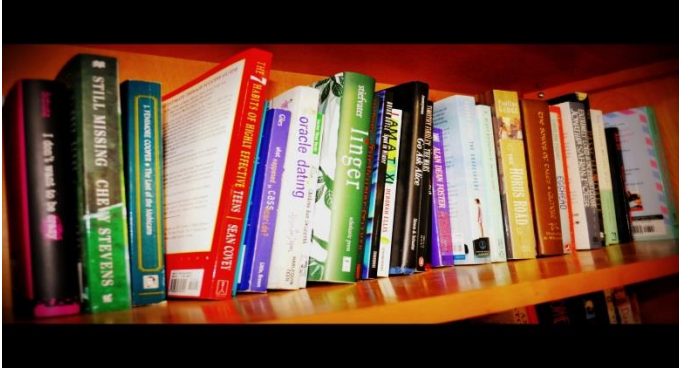
¹¹ Here I am distinguishing that the book clubs the participants belong to are neither affiliated with their respective schools nor part of professional development or Ontario's Ministry of Education initiative, as discussed in my literature review (see Burbank, Kauchak & Bates, 2010; Putman, Smith & Cassidy, 2009 for PD book clubs)

I will now introduce the thirteen participants whose narrative worlds I had the privilege of being welcomed into.

Anne

At the beginning of the interview, Anne humbly stated “When you first mentioned this project I thought there’s no way because we don’t talk about the book enough” (I, 29/10/13). As this was one of my first interviews, I was hesitant at the thought of pursuing a meeting that would not render much of the information I was seeking to understand. I quickly learned that this was a common response from many participants who view their club as more relaxed than other, more serious book clubs: a noteworthy sentiment that I will further address in the findings chapter. That being said, Anne’s interview was not only insightful but also led to an invitation to read with her book club the following February, which I happily accepted.

For the past seven years, Anne has been teaching in an alternative program which provides an opportunity for students to work in a non-traditional school setting to complete their secondary school diploma. Drawn to the flexibility and caring environment that alternative programs offer, Anne currently straddles the roles of a student success teacher and an outdoor education teacher. Her classroom is a space where students can work individually on any of their courses with her support. She sees a lot of focus and attention struggles with her students and “tries to keep her room very quiet so they can have that solitude space to read.” Being in a quiet space to read is very important to Anne as a reader herself, and she creates a welcoming space for her students “to get lost in what they read.” She fondly shares memories of watching her reluctant readers get lost in such epic texts as *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937) and *Into the Wild* (Krakauer, 1996), allowing for these struggling students to be “hooked back in again without the interruptions of questions and answers” (I, 29/10/12).



Anne became a part of her book club four years ago, created by a friend who wanted to start a club with others in the same neighbourhood. Anne quickly took on the secretary role, sending out reminders about the next month's pick as

well as hosting the club at her house every month as she is the only member without children.

The format of the club began in typical fashion of reading one book per month. However, an interesting evolution occurred due to some members not finishing the book before the meeting which often “stopped the ebb and flow of discussion.” The group decided that every other month, members would bring in a fancy fact for discussion—something that they learned through the news or social media—instead of reading an entire book. This format eventually fizzled and evolved into allowing more or less time in regards to the length of the book, checking in where members were at in order to make the discussion “a bit more fluid.” Their club has now morphed into a format where every third month, they take a break from reading a book, but still meeting for “book club”, a fact that they refrain from explaining to their significant others. Anne admits that she is always in a better space after the club meetings where the club acts like a support group, allowing her to “have reflection on what teaching can sometimes be about” (I, 29/10/12).

Anne's RP Excerpt

I have faced challenges with motivation as a reader. I loved being read to, but wasn't the type of person who lost myself in a book. It felt like a lot of work and I was happy to do other things. I also struggled with my spelling.

My favourite book is Zora Neale Hurston, "Their Eyes Were Watching God". I read it when I was doing my masters in Toronto for one of my courses. I didn't enjoy living in Toronto and wasn't totally happy there. When I started this book, I just got lost in the story and in imagining life as it was for this character. It reminded me that life was pretty good for myself.

Reading for me now, is a real treat. I feel like it is a sense of decadence when I allow myself an extended period of time to read a book. Feels like I am doing something good for myself, but so often I get side tracked with a feeling of needing to get things done. It is often the first thing I put aside when I have too much on my plate and feel stressed. But in looking at it, it might be the best thing for me to do as a stress reliever. It is also my night-time ritual. I read every night before bed and it puts me asleep. I usually only get a few pages read, but it relaxes me and helps me to shut off the day. Collectively as a book club, the reading is motivation. I can get stuck on a book for a long time, if I read only a few pages a night. With the book club, it 'forces' me to read for larger chunks of time so I can meet the deadlines. I feel like this is the inspiration I need to put reading more in my life in a healthy way.

Charlotte



Walking into Charlotte’s classroom, I felt like I was transported back in time to the Grade 10 version of myself. Much like the memories of my Family Studies classroom—a class I remembering thoroughly enjoying partly due to the

unconventional set up of the room itself—there were about twelve desks staggered with a newspaper atop each one to the right of the room. To the left, stood an antiquated island kitchen with baby blue painted cupboards and white counter panels with little gold speckles, guitars hanging on the walls and a small group of desks, arranged in a big rectangle. Drawn to the flexible environment that the secondary alternative program offers students, Charlotte has been teaching Grades 9 and 10 Applied English for the past eight years. Charlotte is a colleague of Anne’s and they also belong to the same book club. Charlotte has a full time educational assistant (EA) in her room and her students are a very eclectic group, ranging from non-verbal to reluctant readers.

During our interview, Charlotte directed me to a book shelf in the corner of the room, displaying a small but growing library which she has been building since she arrived in her classroom. Connecting to books



is important to Charlotte herself, as a reader, and she encompasses this when choosing which books to have in her room. The school does not have a library and she admits that many of her students have fines at the public library: a major deterrent for borrowing books.

Charlotte became involved in her club just over four years ago with Anne and four other women. Having the bonds of friendship already established, a book club seemed like a great way to “get together above anything else.” The group of six women meets religiously on the second Tuesday of every month and typically read a range of fiction, memoirs and non-fiction stories. Half the members are civil servants and half are teachers but all are “outdoorsy” and live in the same area, providing “a common thread of things we share.” Charlotte admits that in her area, many social events are “big in numbers” and appreciates this close knit group.

Charlotte's RP Excerpt

I was never much of a reader when I was growing up.... When I couldn't keep the characters straight or the storyline sorted out, I often lost interest and didn't stick with the book unless it was required for a school assignment. I have learned to push past that feeling on most occasions to give a book a chance, but I also take the liberty to put a book down and move to another (something I never did as a child because I was raised to have integrity which meant never quitting anything part-way).

As an adult, I read the most that I've ever read and each year I read another novel that I just love. I'm not someone who re-reads novels, so there's always another one that captures my heart. Some titles include: Power of One, Away, The Glass Castle, The Birth House, The Red Tent, Too Close to the Falls, The Kite Runner and Eat Pray Love. Reading means many things to me both individually and collectively as a family, book club and classroom.

Reading is a source of information and learning about the world, a form of enjoyment and recreation, an escape from my current reality as I delve into a fiction novel. It also enables me to relax, provides a jumping off point for connecting to people through the sharing of ideas and experience and a bonding time with my children before bed. It is part of my career as I try to engage my Gr. 9 students in the classroom.

Diana

I interviewed Diana at a local Starbucks and our lengthy and insightful discussion felt as though we were old friends catching up over a cup of coffee. My cheeks actually ached from the bouts of laughter as we shared book club stories, passions for teaching and reading, and exchanged titles for future reads. For the first time in nine years of teaching, Diana currently has a Grade 4/5 split class. Professing that she identifies more with Grade 6 students as they are “more her age group,” Diana admits that teaching different grades with the added challenge of a split class is an arduous undertaking. Nonetheless, her passion for not only teaching but instilling the love of reading in her students quickly became apparent.

Diana actively uses a book club format in her classroom and regularly discusses some of her own book club experiences with her students. From early on in the school year she talks about her love of reading, how her book club discusses books and how solitary reading sometimes just isn't not enough: “we love to get together and talk about it and it doesn't just end with the last page of the book.” Referencing her book club experiences throughout the year has led to the creation of book clubs in her previous Grade 6 classroom which she runs at the end of April. While she discloses that while it is “definitely a sacrifice in time, it is not for nothing” as Diana assessed oral communication and allotted mini-assignments in between readings. Recanting the rave reviews she's received from parents, Diana stresses the value that she sees in reading novels as opposed to short texts that are often the focus of a balanced literacy program.

Diana's current book club, comprised of ten women, just celebrated their ten year anniversary. This club has an interesting origin as three of the founding members, of which Diana is one, were originally part of another club that had been operating for a couple of years. Diana confesses that she and the other two founding members started to feel annoyed at those

who would attend meetings without having the chosen book read. At the time, Diana admits that they were “all busy mums too so we are all guilty of that once in a while” but the act of reading the book became less of a priority. As Diana explains,

My girlfriend and I had really small children then and we had moved heaven and earth to get the night free, to finish the book first of all and now we are going to watch the movie! [gasps]. And then the next month, they didn't want to discuss the book because it was some season-ender from way back in the beginning of *Survivor* and now I have to watch this because our book club was conflicting with the season finale! My girlfriend and I, we felt like are we the prudes in this club [laugh], and she looked at me and said “We are out of here and I'm going to start my own club” and that is the truth! (I, 13/11/12)

She admits that most of the women in her current club live in her neighbourhood so it just made sense to start another club that was more fitting. While some months are less about the book and more about the reconnecting with friends, reading the book is still something that her current club takes pride in striving for.

Diana's RP Excerpt

I think my favourite book of all time is A Fine Balance by Rohinton Mistry. I really enjoy historical fiction, and this one taught me a lot. But the incredibly-crafted story is what truly won my heart. It was brutally tragic in some places, and just really stayed with me over many years.

I really didn't enjoy reading in high school or first year university, and I therefore never took another English course beyond that. My love of reading developed as an adult. Growing up, I was irritated by my sister who was a voracious reader and a true bookworm. She never wanted to play, always had her nose in a book, and she made me feel pretty stupid because I didn't like reading. There were a few books that really got me hooked on reading as an adult – perhaps most notably Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer (the true story of a fatal climb up Mount Everest).

Now I'm always looking for time to sit down and read. It's a luxury and often my first choice activity when I have time to myself. Reading a "book club" book tends to be a different experience from reading a book of my own choosing. Certain parts of the book make me think, "I must remember to discuss this at book club". If I really like the book, I can't wait to discuss it and, conversely, when I don't like a book, I wonder who suggested it and whether others are feeling the same way as I am. I think the other members of my book club approach reading with a similar mindset.

Emma

Emma's email response to my initial email began as "Hi Jenn, I thought I should clarify to you that the book club I am in does not include the reading of educational books, it is for pure enjoyment." I pondered this response for some time, wondering if the way in which I crafted my recruitment email denoted that I was seeking more of a professional development type book club. I did not emphasize that the book clubs I was pursuing to learn about were those that participants belonged to as a hobby, outside of confines of school, and not for educational purposes, nor did I use any reference that would indicate otherwise. I simply stated "I am seeing teachers who belong to an English speaking book club to volunteer in my study about the functions and uses of the collective reading experience." This soon became a common clarification that I had to make and I further explore these assumptions in the findings chapter.

With 21 years teaching experience, Emma is currently a vice-principal at a new school this year. While maintaining that she is still working with children in her role as a vice-principal, she (not surprisingly) admits she sees little relation between belonging to a book club and pedagogical practices, "other than just a love of reading and the fact that I'm reading some current literature" (I, 07/01/13). She incorporated literature circles in a previous junior class but went on maternity leave and was not able to see how they rolled out. However, she does enjoy the connection she can make with other teachers (and readers alike) about the books she reads. This is particularly useful in her role, not only as an authority figure but also in a new school where "you can have those conversations with people that I think opens the door a bit more" (I, 07/01/13).

Emma belongs to two book clubs: one that she admits is more structured with a longer history, which she chose to focus on during the interview; and one that is more recent and more

relaxed. The more structured club was started 15 years ago by a librarian at one of the schools Emma was teaching at and comprised of approximately 10 females: half of which are teachers and half are civil servants. I sensed a playful and creative edge to this structured club as Emma described a meeting around Easter where the host cut up discussion questions and put them into little plastic eggs, which were then passed around for members to open. Although the club acts as motivation to read for Emma, she appreciates that she doesn't feel judged when time did not allow for her to finish a book in any given month.

Emma's RP Excerpt

I enjoy reading all different types, but tend to stick mostly with fiction. Although I enjoy biographies, I don't tend to read many. I enjoy stories dealing with relationships and tend to pick current top 10 picks. I read some historical fiction but if there is too much detail, I tend to skim! I don't think I have a favourite book, though I do tend to enjoy particular authors - Barbara Kingsolver, Ken Follet to name a couple

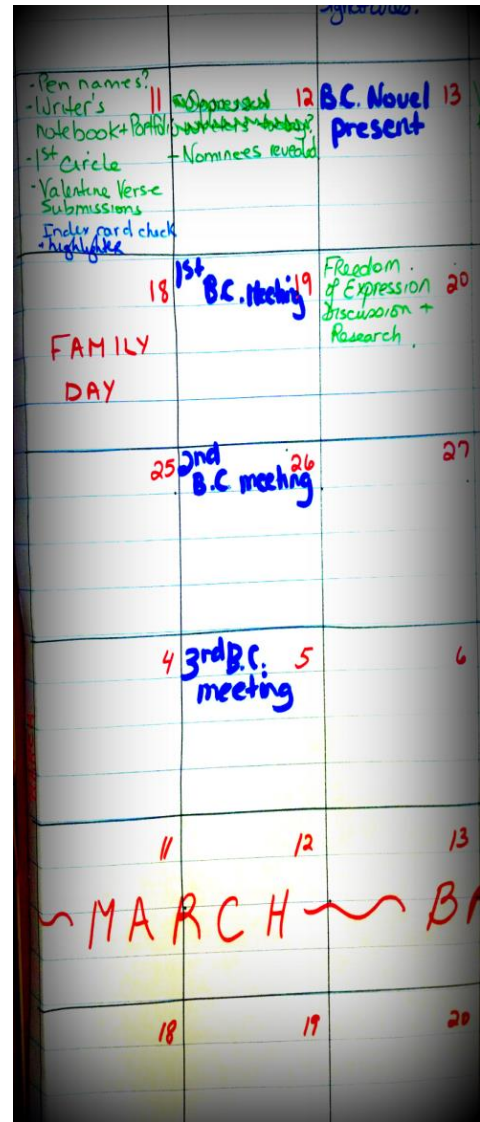
I love to read and don't want to pigeon hole myself too much - that is why I enjoy the book club - I read books I wouldn't otherwise and I end up enjoying most of them!

As I mentioned in our interview I feel that being a current and avid reader opens doors in conversations with other people. It can be a way of finding a common interest and therefore starting a relationship. I have experienced this several times throughout my life with a variety of different people - male and female. Since I have always been a reader and have had a book on the go, I feel that reading has always been a part of my life. It's the way I wind down at night, so without a book, I feel lost. I get excited about starting a book and sometimes am disappointed when it ends because it has been so good! My husband doesn't read, though I wish he would, so we could have discussions about books.

Reading is part of who I am, and being in a book club, adds a social dimension to my reading which I really enjoy!

Grace

I met Grace's for the first time by almost walking into her in the hallway of her senior high school, amidst the chaos of students dismissed for the day, (literally) running down the stairs and out the door. After exchanging pleasantries, she led me to her classroom where the tranquility and serenity were almost palpable. There was classical music playing, a vase full of daffodils atop a bookshelf housing a variety of fantastic books that I have personally read (and loved). Walls were decorated with inspiring literary quotes and literacy strategies. Although this was a conversation style interview, I felt as though I was listening to a motivational speaker merged with a storytelling expert as I felt enlightened by Grace's teaching, reading and learning experiences. With 25 years teaching English to Grades 9-12, Grace speaks with the passion and patience that I would imagine is necessary for such an extensive career. She describes the formative texts she uses in her classes and admits that she now keeps "a much more extensive collection of appealing books that students can sign out": a supplement to her classroom which she attributes to belonging to a book club. Grace also runs a book club unit in all of her classes, early in the semester. Acknowledging that this unit is quite an organizational undertaking, she walks me through the three page handout which details objectives, dates, choices of texts and the assessment rubric for an oral discourse



mark. Nonetheless, Grace remarks,

It's inspiring to watch Grade 11's when they get into this, the Victorian Literature because they hate it at the beginning...but when they do it in book club, they get into it: even the boys! A Tale of Two Cities and you can tell when you sit with them, that they are not doing this on Spark notes, like they really know what they're looking at in the passage, like "remember when he said this?" "No, no, no, he said this..." It's amazing! (I, 5/02/13).

When I asked how Grace first became involved in her book club, she began with "I like this story" and proceeded with a big smile. She has been involved in her book club since its inception over 17 years ago. Grace was on maternity leave at the time and received a phone call from one of the founding members, detailing the plan to start a book club with fellow teachers who were centrally located, adamantly professing "we don't want to be driving all over God's green acre but you're so important to us that we want to include you." At the time, Grace was the only member who lived on the other side of the city and sees that the invite was "sort of a special disposition given to me." The members have shifted in number over the years but many of the core founders remain and the group religiously meets every six or seven weeks. Grace admits that the initial appeal was a social activity to make "us all more literate" but now the club acts as a way for current and retired teachers to reconnect and jokingly exclaims that in reality, "it's all about the food!"



Grace's RP Excerpt

I like generational sagas, and ones set in other cultures (esp. India/Pakistan for some reason); I like mysteries a lot. Lately I've been reading Louise Penny's Inspector Gamache mystery series. I've also been getting more and more interested in poetry, but not books of it... I'm also opening up to non-fiction too, surprisingly – essays and books of non-fiction. So I guess I have a varied palate.

Remembering the Bones by Frances Itani is a real favourite: made me cry, could identify with the daughter-mom relationship, was written beautifully, was fast, written by an Ottawa writer (!), great imagery; The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd: strong message for young women (share it in class with a lot of my girl students), female spiritual power, anti-racism theme, 60s setting; The Power of Myth by Joseph Campbell – non-fiction surprisingly – life-changing, made me see the universality of religious myths and doctrine, written as an interview so it was fast paced, academic; The Five People you Meet in Heaven: life changing look at religion, life and the after-life. I have a lot of favourites but I feel limited by time and also your question asked my favourite book, not books so I guess I need to stop 😊

I didn't find reading hard ever. It's what I would list as one of my main hobbies/past times. It has helped create a circle of friends for me through book club. It's made me a better teacher and the other way around too. I think I've been surprised in my enjoyment of non-fiction lately (The Golden Spruce by John Valliant, essays in the newspaper and Macleans magazine (esp Andrew Feschuk), Devil's Teeth by Susan ?).

Reading is a past time, an education, a comfort, a tool.

Helen

I was greeted at Helen's house by the nostalgic (and euphoric) aroma of banana bread, an elegantly displayed tea set and an arrangement of chocolate truffles. Helen is the mother of friend of mine whom I had met a couple of times previously. As I sat down and poured myself a cup of tea, I felt like I was wearing two very different shoes: the researcher self and the personal self (Reinharz, 2010). As the interview progressed, I felt the distinction of these roles blur and merge together as the conversation continued to unfold. I mentally noted to further explore this tension in my researcher's journal.

Helen currently teaches Grade 10 academic history, has 20 years of teaching experience, and has a background in Latin which she sees as an excellent tool for understanding language. As one might expect, Helen is fond of historical fiction and finds the element of story important for her students to engage with history. Admitting that history can seem dry if just presented as facts, she stresses

It's got to be something that they relate to or understand and connect to, you know. That is something that I tell the kids is that you have to learn that it's a story: figure out the beginning, the middle and the end and you've got it. You can plug the details in later but as long as you get the elements of the story, you've got it. (I, 01/13/13)

Helen finds that she can relate and relay some of the books read in her club to the content of her curriculum by using excerpts and stories in the classroom, although she wishes the club read more historical fiction. Regardless, Helen feels that reading with her book club broadens her literary and historical background and understanding.

Helen belongs to the same book club that Grace does and has been a member for approximately 12 years. She was asked by a fellow teacher after a discussion on a book that Helen was reading at the time that “probably tipped her off that I was a reader and that maybe I would be interested in this club.” While Helen admits that sometimes there is more ‘teacher talk’ than ‘book talk’, she appreciates both the dissection of books and the connection to her colleagues which she feels there is little room to do at school. “I think it’s fine to get together more of a focus than sitting around, complaining and gossiping like at parties when everyone talks about their kids so we needed something else to focus on” (I, 01/13/13).

Helen’s RP Excerpt

I generally read for relaxation now and depending on circumstances will read fiction, often mystery in the summer. I also enjoy biography and will read social history.

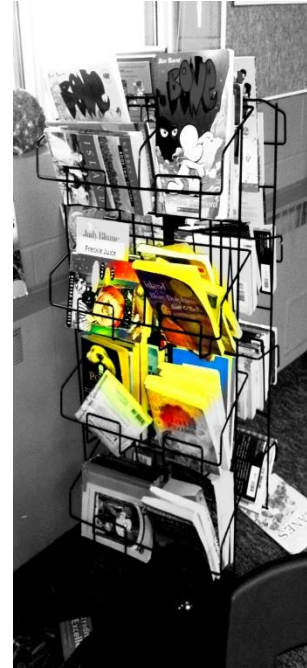
My favourite book is probably No Great Mischief by Alistair MacLeod... I have a soft spot for Canadian stories. The language carries the reader as if on a wave of sadness as he tells the story of the MacDonald family. His writing has been described as graceful and it is. This family’s life mirrors the struggles that many such families have had establishing a life in Canada.

I really balked at the constant dissection of literature in school. I am sure it likely served me well in the future. However I felt that this approach destroyed the rhythm of the read or the wholeness of the story. I am probably more drawn to the overall feeling or concept of what literature imparts rather than the minutiae. I chose not to take English in university for that reason.

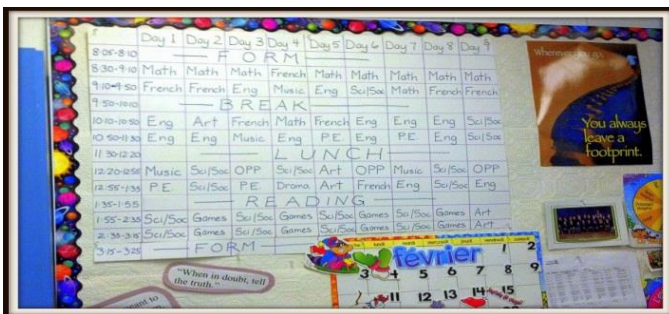
Reading is a tool that opens doors to other worlds of thoughts and ideas. It can be an escape, a path to further knowledge or a way to connect with others.

Isabella

Isabella, a fellow graduate student, was keen on participating in the study, even though her book club had previously disbanded. I had originally sought out teachers who were currently in an active book club but when I first meet Isabella, I felt an instant connection as she maintained that participating in her club had a great impact on her in general. After consulting my supervisor, I decided to proceed with Isabella whose lengthy interview was both an insightful and rich learning experience for me into the esoteric world of private school, of which I have very little experience.



Isabella had 17 years of teaching experience and currently teaches Grade 4, which is the youngest grade at this urban private school. Students come into her classroom with a variety of different learning experiences and skills and it's important for Isabella that the class reads the first novel of the year, Michael Morpurgo's *The Butterfly Lion* (1996), together "as a vehicle to look at language that we use with books: setting, characters, plot etc., and it's really important I know that they understand that" (I, 14/02/13). Isabella clarifies that she incorporates literature circles with her students but not true literature circles where each student assumes a role such as questioner, scribe, etc. that needs to be "introduced, explicitly



taught, and practiced before that students can assume the role" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 51). In future years, she is thinking of creating book clubs as an alternative "to build the sort of idea

that you're in a club" and to avoid the troublesome notion that "it's so easy to kill a book in school." (I, 14/02/13)

The book club Isabella formerly belonged to, lasting only two years, was comprised of teachers from the school. Unlike other clubs, the group often met after school in the staff room: a convenience that Isabella attributed to maintaining consistency in the club's meetings. Despite meeting on school grounds, wine and cheese was a common staple and like many reading groups, is part of the culture. For Isabella, the appeal to joining the club was to share her love of reading and the one, prominent idea that really resonated with her was the motivation to read outside of her comfort zone, even in times where finishing the book was challenging. The group eventually disbanded when the instigator went on leave and while Isabella has contemplated starting or joining a new club, she lightheartedly claims this might be more of a possibility when she eventually retires.

Isabella's RP Excerpt

I most enjoy reading really good fiction, and I seem to be drawn to Canadian writers. My favourite book is No Great Mischief by Alistair McLeod. It is one of the only books that I have ever re-read. I like it because it is wonderfully Canadian, and beautifully written. It begins with an image of the narrator's parents cross country skiing across a body of water with their dogs, and disappearing through the ice, leaving only the barking dogs standing there. It is filled with haunting images and memorable characters.

In becoming a reader, I've enjoyed escaping to other worlds, such as the world inhabited by Anne of Green Gables or the children in the Secret Garden.

On my own, reading is a wonderful, meditative time often enjoyed at the end of a long day. On days when I spend my last waking hour on my computer instead of reading a book, I don't feel as fulfilled. With other people, such as in a book club, reading becomes a shared, social activity. I read the book differently, almost through "many eyes" as I consider what my friends might think as I read, rather than reading for myself only. I make more mental notes of parts I want to talk about or share, rather than just contemplating the text on my own.

James

Since the inception of this research undertaking, I wondered if I would have the privilege of interviewing a man who was part of this woman dominated cultural space (Long, 2003). When opportunity arose, I was excited and elated yet upon reflection, slightly over presumptuous on what this interview would shed light on. Due to time scheduling and travel conflicts, James and I agreed to have the interview via Skype with which we were both comfortable and familiar. To my dismay, we encountered severe technical difficulties that resulted in a recorded telephone conversation. This interview was strikingly different from previous ones, in part, due to loss of the physical and visual comfort level. It was also shorter in length and I didn't feel I connected well with James on a personal level. Nonetheless, I persevered and managed to confront these difficulties and reflect after the fact.

James has been teaching for 23 years and currently teaches Art to junior students. James shares some of the "literacies" that he's done with students: a protest unit in the style of Keith Haring, (whom I have since learned was a world famous social activist and graffiti artist in New York City), artist and piece statements and an aboriginal circle component, informed by Aboriginal Canadian artist Norval Morrisseau. Although James has discussions with his students about particular books that either he or they are currently reading, he admits that he sees neither a connection nor an impact of reading with his book club and his teaching practices. He candidly states: "when [name of person] initially contacted me about this and said what the premise of your PhD was, my instant reaction was I teach art so it doesn't affect me, you know?" However, James agrees that reading with a book club has "made me much more open-minded and a little bit more empathetic towards the feminine perspective of things because everyone else in the club was a woman" (I, 23/03/13).

James recalls his book club started casually with a couple of friends who were interested and snowballed to about ten people through personal connections. Like many, the main appeal was to “talk about good books with people...so it was about the book but it also became very much about just seeing people, socializing and eating good food as well” (I, 23/03/13). For six years, the club met once every six to eight weeks from September to May and James took on the organizing role that is usually required of someone to maintain the club’s meeting logistics. The club met regularly until this past year when for “whatever reason, somebody...didn’t set a date in September.” Eventually, a date was set but by that point, James regrets that most members had started petering out and the club soon disbanded. While James admits that the fizzling out of the club was partly his fault, he does miss the club but isn’t sure if he want to start or join another one.

James’ RP Excerpt

I always remember as a young child hating reading...probably faking completion of a book to a teacher. I didn’t really become a reader until I was in university. Then, in university I took a Canadian Cultural Studies course – I loved it. Loved the course, the prof, everything about it – and we had to read 4 novels for itcan’t remember which ones – but that’s when I truly fell in love with reading – I couldn’t get enough of these books – and started to consume, initially Canadian literature, and then any fiction in general.

Favourite book: A Fine Balance by Rohinton Mistry. I love it because it is a great story! It is also beautifully written, epic in scope and gut wrenchingly tragic. I adored this book. I have recommended this book to literally everyone I know!

Reading means leisure – I always look forward to vacations because I get to read more. While I love travelling for so many reasons – food, art etc. being able to read more is always a huge part of my travels and vacations. Nothing is as pleasurable as reading on a chaise lounge on the beach, or drinking coffee at a café and reading, or passing time on a train reading! I love to read when I learn new things as well, whether it’s about an unfamiliar culture, conflict, historical era etc., I always feel great when I have learned something about the world I didn’t know before.

Lydia

I attempted to meet Lydia at Starbucks for the interview but space was limited so we nestled into an empty corner of a *Chapters* bookstore. With just over three years of teaching experience, Lydia is significantly younger than the rest of my participants: a fact that further fueled my interest to hear about her collective reading and teaching experiences. Glancing at her copy of *The Imposter Bride* (Richler, 2012) which her club's pick of the month, Lydia admits that she always has a book at hand; "if I've got 10 minutes to myself, I open up a book." Her voracious appetite for reading is apparent and I found myself repeatedly making mental notes of titles to add to my extensive list of books I wish to read.

Lydia has a unique position, teaching math, science, chemistry and physics to Grades 8-12 at a private school for students with learning disabilities, namely dyslexia. While students with dyslexia typically struggle with reading, Lydia explains that many students in her classes have taken a SMT [Simultaneous Multisensory Teaching] program designed to help students reconceptualize language concepts. Lydia believes this program, in part, allows her students to fall in love with reading even though the activity remains a difficult undertaking. Being an avid reader of young adult literature and science fiction herself, Lydia regularly suggests book to her students, particular to those who "just eat books."

Instigated and organized by a friend of hers, Lydia has been an active member of her book club for two years. Candidly remarking that she feels like an outcast sometimes due to her juvenile fiction literary tastes, Lydia does enjoy expanding her reading repertoire and finds the club acts as a motivation to read. I was very intrigued by this club's practices, initially due to their comical yet suitable name. They also have a blog site, with book reviews written by members, information about the next month's meeting, complete with a recent photo-shoot of all

eighteen of the members. At the end of each meeting, Lydia explains that the members rate the book out of five in very precise ranking system (e.g. 3.75/5, 4.25/5). This is similar to *goodreads*, a popular website for readers and book recommendations which many members of this club, not surprisingly, subscribe. I was so intrigued by this club's practices that Lydia invited me to one of the club's meetings which was an absolute delight. Lydia concludes that belonging to a book club "is going to influence you whether you like it or not or realize it or not....it just kinds of spans your horizons in that kind of way which is going to help you in any educational format for sure" (I, 03/03/13).

Lydia's RP Excerpt

Reading for me is being in my happy place. All the girls in book club joke around that there is just not enough time and too many books. We all want to have a job where we sit around and read books of our choice all day long and get paid for it (wouldn't everyone?!?!). Realistically, I set aside a few days during each vacation to read because it's one of my favourite and relaxing things I can do.

*I'd like to talk about my favourite book series. Like I said before, I love to escape my reality when I'm reading a book. For that reason, I fell in love with the *Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. The thought of this terrible type of government sending children to fight to the death is awful; and, following the struggles the main character, Katniss, overcomes throughout the series is truly inspiring, even if it is fictitious. I was also a *Twilight* geek. The series by Stephanie Meyer combined everything I love in a book, love stories (and love triangles), science fiction with vampires and werewolves, confrontation and struggles. These books were my 'go to' reads during University when I simply needed a few hours just for me.*

The main experience for me as a reader is that if you love something you should pursue it. Life is busy – full of work, meetings, chores, errands, sports, family, functions, etc. But, at the end of the day when you're exhausted and just want your head to hit the pillow and fall asleep, you should still make room for the little things that make you happy. For me, that's reading. Even if it's a few pages, I make room for that in my busy, hectic life so that I can enjoy something that's all to myself.

Maria

I met Maria in her classroom only days after her school moved in to their new, recently constructed building. Currently undergoing minor, unfinished construction, the building has a certain drywall scent to it, the walls painfully bare. Maria admits that while she and her students are thrilled to finally be in their new room, the library—which was nonexistent in their former temporary school—is not ready for use. While Maria provides “a few books” she agrees that her students need to figure out what they enjoy reading; a difficult endeavor without a selection of texts from which to choose.

Maria has 10 years of teaching experience and currently teaches in a Grade 4 French Immersion class. Sharing that her students are particularly strong this year, she still finds that teaching reading is a challenge. “Reading is very subjective and I find that you can teach someone how to decode and read fluently but to actually teach someone how to question the book is subjective and I find that really hard” (I, 23/03/13). While she had contemplated using literature circles with her students as she has in previous years with older grades, she admits to the stark difference to the reading she does with her book club. Maria further confesses that teaching guided reading and other “things like that” are not the highlights of her teaching practice and she feels that her fellow book club members share similar displeasure.

Maria has belonged to her “very relaxed” book club for three years, meeting once every two months. The club began as a way for a group of teachers, many of whom were leaving the school, to remain social “with an excuse to read”. Unlike other clubs, Maria’s does not have one person who is the deemed organizer. Instead, the person who chooses the book read of the month will host and also organize the logistics of the meetings (emails, etc.). Balancing between fiction and nonfiction but “not really trashy novels like *Fifty Shades of Grey*” (James, 2011), Maria sees

the book club as a motivation to finish the book when she otherwise may not have had the drive, particularly if she was reading a book on her own. Concluding the interview, she jovially remarks that she does not see herself as a “big reader”.

Maria's RP Excerpt

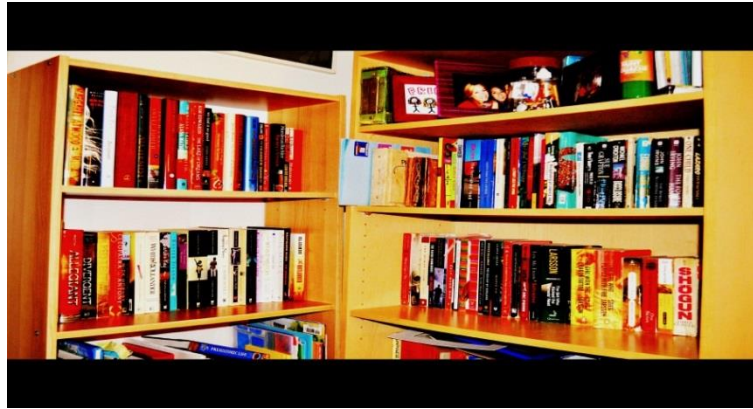
Not sure if I have a favourite book, but one of my favourite authors is Jennifer Weiner. I like her style of writing, because I can relate to her main characters. Her main character usually reflects her own life as a child. Weiner is a Jewish author and she often writes about how the main character copes with religion, family, culture, friends, etc. My parents were immigrants as well, and I guess I always felt a bit "different" than many of my friends, so I find her books humorous and relatable.

Reading was not a positive experience for me until I reached university. I believe I even failed grade 9 English, and had to take summer school. It got a bit better for me in university, because I was taught that it is OK to have my own opinion/ interpretation of what I am reading, as long as I justify my thoughts. Throughout high school, I felt the teachers' expectations were quite rigid, and there was very little room for interpretation or questioning. Students were expected to read a text the teacher asked the students to read (very little choice given) and had to answer a bunch of comprehension questions. I felt there was only one correct answer, and much of the discussion came from the teacher. Very little discussion was done by the students. With this being said, I guess when I was younger, I was turned off reading.

I find reading is a source of entertainment and a source of information. I enjoy being part of a book club, because it gives me a chance to express my reaction to a text and hear a different point of view. Often listening to someone else's point of view gets me thinking about the text in a different way.

Rose

After my previous experience conducting an interview via telephone, I was grateful and honoured that Rose learned how to use Skype for the sole purpose of our interview. The personal connection I felt with Rose was a mixture of admiration, hilarity and the recognition that here was someone whom I would have adored as a kindergarten teacher. As a lifelong reader with an undergraduate degree in English, Rose explained that books are “her thing”: she is very passionate and knowledgeable about the books she chooses to read and “anyone who knows me, knows to ask “What are you reading now?” (I, 26/03/13). She is always on the hunt for well written books and even admitted that she was scanning the titles on my bookshelf behind me while we were talking over Skype. She was an absolute delight to interview and once again, my cheeks (and abdomen) ached from laughter.



With 32 years of teaching experience, Rose just recently retired as a Kindergarten teacher, specializing in students with exceptionalities. Reading—both individually and collectively—has served as an inspiration to teach the love of reading. Rose hopes her students will continue to view stories as, first and foremost, fun. Sharing that her students love read alouds, word play and rhyme, Rose cites a dozen children’s books that she has recently read with her students. Rose admits that she prefers “magical stories” over “concept books” to her students [e.g. alphabet books, mechanics of reading, etc.] but I can only imagine that she possesses the power to turn any text into an animated story.

There some native tales that I've read that are fabulous and the illustrations are amazing and the story is about a crow or how we got the sunshine, you know these magical stories. It's not about how A did B did C did D which is *BORING* [emphasis in interview], you know what I mean? It is just so forced but when it's a story; I mean the kids will never forget it. If you think about your own childhood and what stories you remember, they had nothing to do with the alphabet or numbers. (I, 26/03/13)

Rose has been part of her book club for 17 years, comprised of six women who are all founding members. Initially, Rose professes she found the dynamic slightly difficult as she was the only member who lived outside of the neighbourhood and worked full time but has grown very comfortable with the group. Other than her friend who asked her to join the group initially, Rose admits that she doesn't have anything in common with the members except for their love of talking about what they read. Rose gives credence to the club for motivating her to read, giving her a break from work and home and "it just made you feel like an important part of life."

Rose's RP Excerpt

I love The Stand, by Stephen King, The Human Stain, by Phillip Roth many, many more....why? Beautifully written, intriguing story, amazing plot, fascinating characters etc.

I was an English major and had many wonderful teachers. Mrs. Winchester, my Grade Two teacher just was an all-around supportive person who made me feel that I could do anything. I just attacked books of all sorts and never looked back.

Reading means, as an individual, that I am alive and learning constantly. I can escape, laugh, cry, scream, love, and cringe at those experiences I variously live through in words. I love sharing my reading experiences with my book club members who are very different readers than I am. Our various perspectives and life stories allow us to take an infinite variety of experiences from the books that we share together.

Although reading is a solitary business, reading with a book club makes it a social one as well.

Sophia

My interview with Sophia began on a different note from the others, with her questioning how and why I become involved in a project about teachers' involved in books clubs. As I began my semi-rehearsed rationale, I was suddenly aware that I was talking on what Reinharz (2010) calls the situational self—one that is created within the field. Despite the many times I have responded to this question, I was being asked by one of my participants and suddenly the researcher role felt reversed. I felt nervous, stripped of my power as the interviewer and vulnerable as the interviewee. I felt pressure to answer in a concise and articulate manner for fear that Sophia would think of me insincere, an amateur, or worse: a fraud. Nonetheless, the interview continued in conversation-style and Sophia responded to my rationale by sharing her speculations and experiences of what she identifies as her “idea club.”

Sophia currently teaches Art to Grades 9 and 11 at an urban senior high school. With fifteen years' experience, Sophia laments the use of the latest “buzz words” in education (e.g. critical thinking) that dominate pedagogical rhetoric, “We are having all of these meetings endlessly, and going over the same stuff...like how could you not do it? I don't know how you could teach without doing that frankly.” She admits that the very nature of Art as a subject is conducive to thinking critically in order to articulate one's choice in creating a piece of art. She sees her idea club as a chance to talk to like-minded others who know how to think and “don't get caught in the web of bureaucratic stuff...and I actually bring some of that [discussion of ideas] back into the classroom” (I, 08/04/13).

This idea club has been running for about two years, comprised of a loose group of about five women, some of who are also teachers. Partly as a way to get together with fellow teachers, Sophia explains that they tried to “do the typical book thing” where everyone reads the same

book, but this structure quickly fizzled. Instead, each meeting sheds light on whatever the group decides to create in that particular moment. Sometimes the members read the same book, sometimes everyone shares the ideas from what each member is currently reading and other times, they watch a documentary. Sophia enjoys the flexible structure of the meetings and speculates that because many of the members are teachers, they don't want that same structure when it comes to a book club: "you can throw it open and trust that something will come of it. For me, it's nice not to live in your head all the time where the ideas can just caught up in the loop" (I, 08/04/13). Sophia concludes the interview, feeling as though she did all the talking. I felt the same way.

Sophia's RP Excerpt

I read murder mysteries, art books, psychology, mindfulness, brain and science developments, fiction from a variety of authors, gardening, décor and design, woodworking, puppetry, travel....

Favourite Book: No Great Mischief, Alistair McLeod. The scope the characters and family relationships and its imagery.

Reading has been my introduction to the world beyond my immediate surroundings. It's exploration at the personal, intellectual, and spiritual levels. It has been a salvation during periods of despair. I feel that it is a shared experience of life.

Books and their ideas are integral to my life and provide a common ground with others whether speaking casually or with friends. I truly cannot imagine a life without books.

Kathleen

Kathleen was my final interviewee. Although I initially proposed a maximum of 12 participants, I felt obliged to follow through with this final interview for two reasons: we had a lengthy history of email correspondence where Kathleen articulated she was very interested in participating in the project; and, I was haunted by previous interviews that I felt were potentially less rich and forthcoming than others. I remember sitting at a café, waiting for Kathleen, smiling at any random woman who walked by as we did not inform each other on our appearance. My thoughts were argumentative and incessant as I pondered why I was interviewing a thirteenth participant. Superstitious maxims occupied my thoughts and I sat, fidgeting both physically and mentally. I shook my head, embodied the researcher self, and smiled at the woman with the funky earrings walking towards me.

Kathleen currently teaches Grade 7 students identified as gifted at a junior school. As an avid newspaper reader, keeping in tune with current events is important to Kathleen's pride as an educated and active citizen. Carrying this passion into her classroom, Kathleen explains that for the first time in her 28 years of teaching, she recently created a newspaper unit with her students where they followed certain current events over a period of time, eliciting discussion about how to substantiate an opinion. Similar to the reading of books, Kathleen sees reading the news as a means to not only enhance one's knowledge of the world but to connect with others which she wants her students to realize is essential. Belonging to a book club makes Kathleen aware of the types of questions that she poses to her students on what they read, steering away from traditional comprehension and more towards meaning, language and characters.

Kathleen's former book club, comprised of neighbourhood women and lasting for eight to ten years, eventually replaced reading books with playing hockey. The members still wanted

to stay in touch despite the disbandment of the book club and thought hockey would be something fun. Kathleen is currently a member of a second book club that has been in operation for 10 years, with about nine members who live in her neighbourhood, and have “a real interest in literature and a love for words” (I, 02/05/13)

Kathleen's RP Excerpt

Favourite book. Right now it is 'On Canaan's Side' by Sebastien Barry. I love it for the rich language, the pathos of the story, and the way it integrates historical experience. I also love anything by Alice Munro. When I read her, I'm a better person because I think more empathetically about others, and myself for the duration and while the 'afterglow' lasts.

I went through a period where I couldn't read (after my children were born, and when they were small). I couldn't open myself up to other's experiences through reading because becoming a parent was already so overwhelming. (I was older, and had struggled to overcome some miscarriages, so parenthood was a real desired dream). Then, when I started reading again (by joining a book club again) I went through it backwards: I sometimes started a novel in the middle and jumped around. Or began it and then read the ending and then would flip through to follow different characters or threads that interested me. I approached it like a puzzle, instead of in a linear fashion. I'm not sure why. Maybe it was a way of controlling the intensity of the reading experience.

Reading is a shortcut to living a multiplicity of experiences and lives, comfortably! It has the ability to make you more empathic. Reading in a book club lets me discuss ideas, and often gain a deeper appreciation and understanding than if I just read something alone. After a book club meeting, I invariably walk away with an even deeper appreciation of what is accomplished, presented or revealed in a text, than what I had on my own.

INTERLUDE: READING THIS THESIS

The rest of this thesis tells the story of how participants in this study experience individual and collective reading and how they perceive their book club experiences to influence their pedagogical practices. In the chapters that follow, I attempt to provide substantial evidence to showcase the themes that I traced throughout the research process. Aligning with the tenants of narrative inquiry, I also attempt to stay authentic to my participants' voices and weave in my storied experience when their words resonated with me. I unpack my experiences at three book club meetings as a way to contextualize this study and offer a glimpse into the intimate spaces I felt privileged to attend. I continue to inquire what reading means to my participants by exploring their past and present reading experiences. I examine the reasons for joining and remaining in a book club and the processes that occur within this provocative space which leads to various pedagogical links. I conclude with how book clubs offer possibilities for teachers to consider how and why they read, and end with suggestions for current and future research and practice.

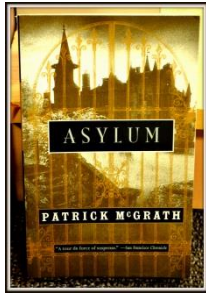
BOOK CLUB MEETINGS

“Book clubs are the graduate seminar, the encounter group, and the good old fashioned village-pump gossip session, all rolled into one.”

(Margaret Atwood, *The Book Club Group*)

What follows are excerpts from my researcher’s journal of my experiences at three meetings of different clubs, followed by reflections to contextualize the meetings that I participated in. Generally speaking, all three club meetings were situated in Ottawa and surrounding area and composed exclusively of women, who read a range of fiction and non-fiction memoirs. Diana has been a member of her club for just over 10 years, Anne for four years and Lydia for two years, respectively. Although I did not selectively choose the invitations to these meetings, I was pleasantly surprised that all three clubs drastically differed in terms of the social dynamic within the groups. Each meeting was unique with its procedures and protocols but there were common threads linking these intimate spaces: an abundance of tasty treats proudly made by the members; comforting drinks, ranging from tea to wine; and, a cozy, circular space to settle into and feel welcomed. All meetings lasted between two to three hours and occurred during evenings, hosted in one member’s home. There was typically a 20-30 minute social precursor for members to arrive, grab a drink and get comfortable. Members would catch up on events and such that occurred over the last month before the conversation would either naturally gravitate towards the chosen book or the host would actively steer the conversation towards the book discussion. As the end of the meetings drew near, administrative issues such as the proceeding month’s book selection, absent members, subsequent hosts, etc., were discussed. By first providing a narrative analysis of the chosen text, I will now offer my insights into the three club meetings I attended in attempts to contextualize my experience.

Patrick McGrath's (1996) Asylum



Diana has forewarned that this was a darker book than the club usually reads and she was excited to read something “dark and twisty”. I was instantly intrigued. Described as a gothic novel with a psychologically penetrating vision, this captivating story of obsession is narrated by psychologist Peter Cleave who eventually becomes part of the twisted tale. *Asylum* chronicles the story of a torrid love affair and eventual demise of Stella Raphael, a woman of great beauty and mother to Charlie and married to Max, an unromantic and staid psychiatrist who is currently working as a superintendent at a maximum security hospital in rural England. Into Stella’s lonely existence enters Edgar Stark, an artistic patient committed for violently murdering his wife, who restores an old Victorian conservatory in Raphael’s family garden. Stella and Edgar embark in an explosive, passionate affair, which leads to Edgar escaping from prison, taking refuge in London’s underground artists circle. Although the illicit affair becomes known, Max and Peter (narrator and Max’s professional colleague) cover up the escape to avoid a potentially scandalous situation, further straining the relationship between Max and Stella, as well as Max’s position at the prison.

Missing her lover, Stella finds Edgar and starts visiting London and eventually leaves her family to join him in hiding. While she temporarily embraces the underground circuit, a far cry from her privileged setting in rural England, life takes a turn for the worse when Edgar’s jealousy and violence becomes unleashed. He creates a morbid bronzed sculpture of Stella’s head; an ominous sign which frightens Stella. The police eventually track Edgar who flees from hiding but Stella is arrested and reunited with her family. The scandal explodes and Max is fired from his position. In attempts to start fresh, the struggling family moves to the Welsh

countryside. Stella becomes reclusive and depressed, leading to a disturbing, loveless sexual affair with a married farmer. Stella longs for Edgar, obsessively hoping that he finds her and whisks her away from her misery. She struggles to care for Charlie, further adding to her melancholic and miserable state. Stella starts using narcotics, prescribed by Max, numbing her pain and pushing her further into a reclusive and withdrawn state.

One night, Max returns home and tells Stella that the police arrested Edgar that morning in a neighbouring village, only twelve miles away. *Only twelve miles away!* Shortly after, in a small attempt to repair the relationship with her son, she accompanies Charlie on a school trip. While trying to catch a newt in the weeds at the bottom of steep slope, Charlie falls into a pond. Stella witnessing this scene but in trance like state, does nothing.

She watched him mutely, and passively and smoked her cigarette as he grabbed it, whatever it was, and lost his balance. The air was dark and the rain was coming harder now and the awful undulation had almost stopped and she felt the creeping numbness that always came afterwards. Charlie was in deeper water now, trying to scramble upright and flailing around and shouting, and something in his shouting brought her to her feet. She stood in the gusting wind and rain with her shoulders hunched up tight and watching him for a few moments. Then she turned her head to the side and brought the cigarette to her lips. The edges of her head scarf fluttered wildly about her face; the waves were almost gone. She turned back and dimly saw a head break the surface, and an arm claw the air, then go under again, and she turned aside and again brought the cigarette to her lips. With one hand she clutched her elbows as her arm rose straight and rigid to her mouth. She turned her head to the side and again brought the cigarette to her lips and inhaled, each movement tight, separate and controlled. (p. 200)

In the messy aftermath, Stella is arrested and placed in the care of Peter Cleave, the narrating psychologist and current superintendent of the asylum where Max formerly worked. Stella later admits that she imagined Edgar as Charlie in the water, his death perceived as a symbolic ending to her painful longing. Peter works closely with Stella, offering certain privileges such as sessions in his house, gin and tonics, sleeping pills, and other commodities restricted to her fellow female inmates. Stella slowly works through her remorse and appears to be coming to terms with the accident, with dubious undertones of a façade. Over time, their professional relationship teeters on friendship yet Peter's obsession with Stella becomes increasingly obvious. Peter eventually proposes marriage, offering Stella a life of different *asylum* with him in his pending retirement. She agrees but Peter underestimates her unremitting love for Edgar, who she learns is in solitary confinement *at the very same institution*. The story ends with Stella overdosing on narcotics that she's hoarded during her stay at prison. The last scene details Peter in his office, surrounded by all of the drawings Edgar made of Stella when they were in London. In his desk drawer lays the bronzed head of Stella, the last piece of artwork that Edgar created before their parting. "I often take it out, over the course of the day, and admire it. So you see, I do have my Stella after all. And, of course, I still have him" (p. 254).

I enjoyed reading this dark, creepy tale. At times, I was disturbed by the blurred lines of sanity and obsession. I was mesmerized by the detailed writing and the powerful narrative from the view of a psychologist who was equally wrapped up in the twisted tale. In certain instances, I felt empathy for Stella and her woe begotten state and at other times, I was screaming "*don't do it, don't do it!*" I read this book in about three weeks prior to the meeting and was very excited to hear the book club members' responses. Although *Asylum* is a more subtle glimpse into the world of obsession, I was reminded of early readings of *American Psycho* (Ellis, 1991) and *The*

Red Dragon (Harris, 1981), which left me equally disturbed yet satisfied feelings of entering into the realms of insanity. I have always been drawn to stories that unleash the dark side of humanity. Although I had visceral reactions while reading this book (and others alike)—gasps, sighs, my hand to my head in disbelief—I found this story tantalizing in a way that feeds the craving to fathom the often incomprehensible depths of madness.

The Meeting



Down coats with red mittens, rosy cheeks, pleasantries creating cloud breath linger in the cold air. Our host with perfectly painted burgundy toenails opens the door to the warmth of her home. We pile in,

handshakes and more pleasantries, I am lead to a kitchen that looks like is should be on the cover of Home Décor and handed a glass of vintage merlot. More handshakes, smiles and we gather around an ottoman topped with a decadent cheese platter, cocktail shrimp, dates stuffed with goat cheese wrapped in mint and prosciutto, maple bacon glazed donuts, strawberries and popcorn. Heart patterned napkins look too perfectly placed to actually use. Diana winks my way, as a friendly reminder that the food and wine—as essential as the books themselves—are delightful pleasures of attending this book club meeting. With a sip of wine and a nibble of shrimp and I am ready to rock! (Journal entry, 01/02/13).



After the socializing naturally died down, the discussion of *Asylum* ensues. Leading the discussion, Diana motions to the member on her left to begin sharing her experiences of engaging with this book.

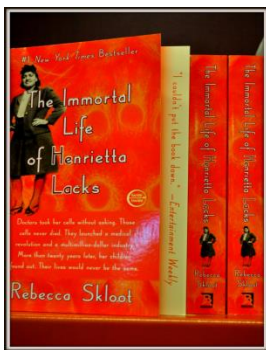


One by one in round-robin style, the nine women recant their thoughts, feelings,

musings and questions they encountered as they read the twisted tale. Although each member had her timely spotlight, members often jumped in, sharing similar or varying perspectives, complete with laughter, nodding of heads, swags of fingers and more helpings of the appetizer feast grounding the circle. Diana had prepared notes on the history of the author as well as guiding book club type questions; an interesting practice in popular reading culture (Ivy, 2011). Not surprisingly, much of conversation centered on mental illness; prominent in both the setting of the story and the pretense of the narrative. I was fascinating by the varying perspectives of Stella's degree of mental illness and the control of the narrator. Some believed that Stella was mentally sound; her demise resulting from selfishness and boredom, leading to the obsessive affair, the death of her son and eventually her own suicide. Others strongly felt that her mental illness became more apparent as the story progressed and was the true culprit of her peculiar and disturbing actions, too difficult to fathom through the eyes of a mentally sound women. These perceptions echo Holland's (1975) musings that defense mechanisms that readers create to cope with the reality of situations, much like we do when faced with difficult life situations. For some members, the demise of Stella was easy to digest in the face of mental illness rather than a woman's selfish scorn for passion.

These conflicting perspectives were voiced, challenged and negotiated by the members and many shared past experiences and memories of very personal attachments to mental illness. One member shared a childhood memory of witnessing her mother being taken away by paramedics after a nervous breakdown and feeling confused as to why this was happening. Another member was convinced that the narrator of the novel, Peter, orchestrated the entire unfolding of the story as a manipulated mastermind, the true sociopathic puppeteer controlling the characters like pawns to eventually capture his queen. Another member shared stories of her mother's extramarital affair which resulted in leaving the family and strained relationships with her and her siblings. This same member incidentally grew up in England and remembers riding her bike near a psychiatric hospital where Patrick McGrath's father once worked. Negotiations of being trapped in a loveless marriage, opposed to accepting that marriage is sometimes boring, ensued as each member contributed an insight from their lived experience. I see this discussion evidencing what Rosenblatt (1978) argues is the pinnacle of aesthetic reading, where "the attention is centered directly on what [she] is living through during the relationship with that particular text" (p. 24-25). These women were not recanting facts that they had learned from the text: they were making meaning from articulating their transactions with the text as they transacted with the group, creating new insights and collective understandings.

Rebecca Skloot's (2010) The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks



Before Henrietta Lacks—a Black tobacco farmer, wife and mother to five—died in 1951 from cervical cancer, samples of her tumour were taken without her or her family's knowledge. At the time, scientists had struggled to maintain the vitality of cells but to no avail. Henrietta's cells became the first to be cultured as they reproduced an entire generation after twenty

four hours and continue to do so today. Known only to the scientific community as *HeLa* (pronounced hee-la), Henrietta's cells have been bought, sold and used in such vital medical advancements as polio vaccine, chemotherapy, gene mapping, in vitro fertilization, and more. Yet the history of Henrietta Lacks, the woman whose personal legacy was virtually ignored, is connected to a very dark history including racism, medical experimentation on Black peoples, domestic violence, poverty and bioethics.

The Lackses challenged everything I thought I knew about faith, science, journalism, and race. Ultimately, this book is the result. It's not only the story of HeLa cells and Henrietta Lacks, but of Henrietta's family—particularly Deborah—and their lifelong struggle to make peace with the existence of those cells, and the science that made them possible. (p. 7)

Skloot's writing is very transparent, positioning herself as a privileged, aspiring academic advocate, as she narrates her challenging journey into uncovering Henrietta's life that intercepts race, ethics and medicine. With few resources and a vast passion, she locates the Lacks family, who struggle to trust her motives after years of broken promises from the medical community and little understanding of cellular growth and reproduction. Skloot slowly gains their trust, developing a particularly close relationship with Henrietta's daughter, Deborah. Throughout the story, the Lacks family struggle with poverty is juxtaposed against the billion dollar medical research community/establishment. This captivating, eye-opening story calls into question bioethical legal rights over our bodies, validated knowledges and human consequences of scientific discovery. The following passage is the voice of Deborah (written verbatim including font),

When I go to the doctor for my checkups, I always say my mother was HeLa. They get all excited, tell me stuff like how her cells helped make my blood pressures medicines and antidepression pills and how all this important stuff in science happen cayuse of her... But I always have thought it was strange, if our mother cells done so much for medicine, how come her family can't afford to see no doctors? Don't make no sense. People got rich off my mother without us even knowin about them takin her cells, now we don't get a dime. I used to get so mad about that to where it made me sick and I had to take pills. But I don't got it in me no more to fight. I just want to know who my mother was. (p. 9)

I found this book captivating, enriching and thought provoking. Although I had not heard of this book beforehand, I have had many conversations with others since reading it. As a researcher, I was drawn to Skloot's transparency, which some criticized that the book is more about her than about Henrietta Lacks. I disagree and see the power of the subjective and reflected voice in writing and was duly impressed by this decade-long research undertaking. I do not often read non-fictional works (other than memoirs) but I was hooked early on in this book by the vast amount of medical knowledge intertwined with an intriguing narrative and educational historical accounts. Further, I enjoyed the complicated bioethical conversation that Skloot provokes and unpacks yet does not offer easy answers to solve. Although the Lacks family has received some closure of their history, there is no happy ending to this book. As I turned the last page, I felt somewhat satisfied and left with a sense that I been enlightened on a subject with which I was unfamiliar. However, I wanted more dialogue, more insight, and more perspective. This book left me questioning such concepts as bodily ownership, bioethics and social injustices and I was excited to see how the members of the book club felt after they turned the last page.

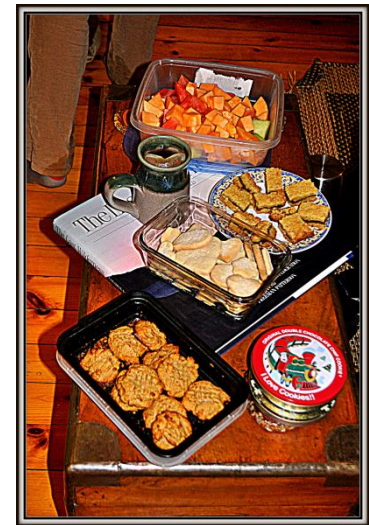
The Meeting



Driving in unfamiliar territory on the outskirts of Ottawa. Minus 10 degrees. Light snow falling, A log cabin atop of a winding hill, a little too steep for my Toyota. My car is parked/stuck in a snow bank near an abandon shack at the bottom of the hill. I fear that I am

late or worse, lost. Running up the hill, my freshly baked peanut butter cookies in a plastic bag, dangling from my arm, swinging side to side. The vertigo was so steep that I felt my body, leaning forward, was almost horizontal to road. Breathing heavily and almost starting to panic, I arrive at the top, just as a 4x4 Jeep Cherokee pulls up and four women pile out. Catching my breath, I awkwardly smile, and one says “you must be Jenn!” (Journal entry, 13/02/13).

We entered into Anne’s beautiful rustic home, warmed by a wood stove, surrounded by wooden framed windows. Her selection of tea was one of the largest I’ve seen outside of a bona fide tea shop. I chose lemon ginger. We all arranged our baked treats on the coffee table, our hands curled around steaming tea mugs. Introductions and pleasantries ensue. I caught up with Charlotte, whom I’d interviewed months before. There is a brief lull in the conversation and Anne, the evening’s host, motioned for the discussion to turn to the chosen



book. Similar to Diana’s meeting, one by one, members shared how they felt about the story of

Henrietta Lacks and her immortal cells. Much of the discussion centered on ethical issues regarding ownership of bodies and cells. There was definitely a palpable sense of empathy for the family of Henrietta, particularly in term of the social injustices, both historically and present day. The research work from the author was also a topic of interest as her narrative within the story displays a very candid, passionate and determined researcher/writer. For some, this begged the question of who owns the story now and what Deborah, Henrietta’s daughter who died just before the publishing of the book, would have thought about the narrative. Ethics of using cells in the creation of vaccines and other prolific advancements in terms of illness and diseases were negotiated in very complex and contradictory ways.

All but one of the members are mothers with young children, and the discussion gradually shifted from the book to stories of their children, issues with school and day care. Stories of past teachers, awkward moments in school, memoirs of sport teams, relationship idiosyncrasies arose as did the octaves of laughter in the room. Recipes of baked goods were exchanged just before the group decided their next book club choice. Glances at watches, yawns and tired eyes. Anne admitted afterwards that “it was one of our best book club discussions and the longest” (personal email, 02/20/13). I found this fascinating and another reminder of how my presence inevitably influenced the discussion.

Marina Nemat’s (2007) Prisoner of Tehran



Marina Nemat tells her story of life as a political prisoner in the early days of Iranian Revolution. In 1982, 16 year-old Marina was arrested for leading a school protest, sent to Evin—Tehran’s most notorious prison—and sentenced to death. Shifting between colourful memories of childhood, the desolate life behind walls of Evin and her forced

marriage to a prison guard, Marina shares painful memories of living in fear yet finding strength, hope and love in the face of despair.

Marina was raised Christian as both of her grandmothers immigrated to Iran from Russia to escape the Russian revolution. With a father, a dance teacher, and a mother, a hairdresser, Maria grew up to be a critical thinker with a love for such canonical Western literature as *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis, 1950-56), *Little Women* (Alcott, 1868-69) and *War and Peace* (Tolstoy, 1869). During the rise of the revolution against the Shah's regime, Marina quickly found groups separating within her community, motivated by opposing political ideologies. Finding herself at odds with the newly imposed rules and regulation of the Islamic Republic, Marina organizes a seemingly innocuous protest against a teacher's insistence on teaching politics rather than calculus, resulting in her name being listed as a government enemy, leading to her arrest.

Marina recounts very candid and disheartening memories of daily torture. One of guards, Ali, becomes increasingly enamoured with Marina. He brings her chicken soup, cleans her wounds from torture and tries to reassure her that hope is not lost. From here, her relationship with this guard changes the course of her life in prison. Using his connections, Ali is able to have Marina's sentence reduced to life imprisonment and saves her life, literally just minutes before her scheduled execution.

One of the guards lifts me off the ground and another tied me to the pole. The rope digs into my flesh. I was so tired. *Is dying going to hurt as much as being lashed?...* They aimed their guns at us, and I close my eyes. *I hope Andre knows I love him. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you...* I heard a car speeding towards us and opened my eyes. For a moment, I thought we were going to be run over. There was a loud screeching

noise, and a black Mercedes came to a stop right in front of the guards. Ali stepped out of it. He went straight to Hamehd and gave him a piece of paper. They spoke for a moment. Hamehd nodded. His eyes focused on mine, Ali walked toward me. I wanted to run, I wanted Hamehd to shoot me and end my life. Ali untied me from the pole. I collapsed. He caught me, lifted me and walked towards to car...Ali dropped me in the front passenger seat and slammed the door... Gathering all my strength, I began punching him, but he held me back with one hand. Guns fired as we sped away [emphasis in original].
(p. 39-40)

Under the threat of execution of her family and friends, Ali proposes marriage to Marina and she reluctantly accepts. She grudgingly converts to Islam, marries Ali, spending half the time in the marital home, and the other half in prison, all under Ali's watchful eye. Although Marina despises Ali, over time she appreciates his care for her and her hatred begins to dissipate. She becomes well acquainted with Ali's family despite the parameters of her marriage. Within a year after her arrest, Marina becomes pregnant and Ali intends to resign as a prison guard. He is suddenly assassinated by rival comrades. Marina loses the baby, returns to prison and almost loses hope of ever being free until Ali's parents obtain her release, fulfilling Ali's last wishes. On March 26, 1984, Marina is released and returns home to her family and teenage love, Andre. Within a year, Marina receives her high school diploma, marries Andre and tries to recover from her years of imprisonment. They have a son, moved outside of Tehran when Andre obtained a position at a local university and attempt to escape the precarious political climate. Eventually obtaining passports for a hefty price, Marina, Andrew and their son spend ten months in Budapest, waiting for Canadian refugee status. On August 28th, 1991, nearly nine years after

Marina's arrest, they land in Toronto. Marina completes a master's degree from the University of Toronto and begins her journey of writing this memoir.

This book was an interesting and, at times, heart wrenching read. I enjoy memoirs for the powerful narrative style, allowing for the author's voice to be heard. Situated in a time and place unbeknownst to many, Nemat's story is one with which is it difficult not to be engaged.

Admittedly, I missed the flowery language more common in fictional works but I did appreciate her detailed description of her life's moments, ranging from buying birthday dresses in her childhood to her contemplation of suicide at the precipice of a forced marriage. I found her writing candid, subversive and eye-opening, in the face of some (including her family) who wanted her to remain silent. Her only agenda was to have her story told in her own voice. In an article in *The Toronto Star*, Nemat admits,

"The people don't want to dig up that dirty past and let ugly secrets out," she says. "It was exactly the same reaction my own family had after I was released – sit around the dinner table and talk about the weather. Good people talk about the weather. Bad people talk about politics" (Shepard, April 22, 2007).

This book is a true testament to the power of perseverance in the face of hopelessness.

The Meeting

I enter into a high-rise apartment, the last to arrive. Twelve women all in their 20's sit in a circle. A table off to the right is filled with a range of appetizers, desserts, wine. Candles placed in empty



wine bottles, walls decorated with self-assembled bookshelves; signs of the twenty-something urban lifestyle that I once lived. Large windows offer a picturesque view of the sun setting over the Rideau River, painting the hints of shadows on eggshell coloured walls. The conversation halts as I quietly take my seat on the shiny, hard-wood floor. The founder and leader of the club quickly introduces me, I smile and nod to the faces smiling back at me, and the conversation continues. (Journal Entry, 08/04/14)

During our interview, Lydia has described the club as “super laid back and easy going” yet jokingly depicts the leader and founder as “kind of a dictator. She’s very organized and kind of controls the flow of the conversations...” (I, 03/03/13). As I listened to members’ responses to the book, I was fascinated by how focused the conversation was. I thought this was inevitably due to a number of factors, least of which I felt that I was crashing a book club meeting due to my late arrival. Nonetheless, I was pleasantly surprised to hear descriptive and very detailed responses to Marina Nemat’s memoir. True to the club format that Lydia described during her interview, one by one members rate the book out of five, detailing their justifications for their score. One member remarks that reading memoirs is a refreshing change from the fiction that the club typically reads. Another admits she was shocked to realize the events which Marina details are fairly current, exemplified by one of the photos of a prisoner in Evin from 2006. Some share that at times, they felt like they could not connect to the language, which I could relate to, but still appreciated the honesty in her writing. One member felt she had gained a heightened sense of awareness about a time and a place she felt very ignorant about and looks forward to reading more memoirs of women from the Middle East. Many members agreed.

Questions also arose to what Marina’s life was like after arriving in Toronto and another member shares her responses she had to Marina’s second memoir entitled *After Tehran: A life*

reclaimed. Lydia admits that although she gave the book a high rating (4/5) she's looking forward to reading a fictional work as the club has recently "been on a memoir kick lately." Most members gave this book a 4+/5, with two giving ranks of in 3s/5. The leader concluded that this was a very successful "book club book" and turns the conversation over to a member whose turn it is to pick next month's book. There is a vote between two memoirs: Cheryl Strayed's (2012) *Wild* and Jeannette Walls (2005) *The Glass Castle*. One member blurts out that she cannot stand to read another book about a privileged woman's travelling escapes. There is a roar of laughter and *The Glass Castle* wins the vote by a landslide. The next day, I received an email invite to the book club's blog.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the thirteen participant profiles by weaving our co-constructed narratives with my experiences that I had in the data collection process. These profiles are created to familiarize the reader with the participants' reading and teaching backgrounds as well as to consider thoughts and feelings as researcher as I engaged with the data collection process. I also provide contextualized experiences of my attendance at three separate book club meetings by first presenting a narrative analysis of each of the three books read prior to these meetings. I attempt to further situate my research with the use of photographs to in attempts to capture some of the particularizations that Butler-Kisber (2010) discusses, thereby adding to the story telling capability of research itself. I now turn to the participants' early recollections of reading which helped my understandings of the experiences that have shaped the participants individual and collective reading practices.

READERS READING PRACTICES: THE BEGINNING

“Few children learn to love books by themselves. Someone has to lure them into the wonderful world of the written word: someone has to show them the way.”

(Orville Prescott, *A Father Reads to His Children*)

The overarching question of my dissertation is why the thirteen participant teachers join book clubs. Not surprisingly, all participants joyfully admit that the main appeal to joining a book club is to share their love of reading with other readers. Reading is a source of pleasure, a way to make “comprehensible the myriad of ways in which human beings meet the infinite possibilities that life offers” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 5) and sharing this with others is important to these participants.

Reading is a tool that opens doors to other worlds of thoughts and ideas. It can be an escape, a path to further knowledge or a way to connect with others. A book club gives a gathering a sense of purpose. It can expose members to new genres of reading and in discussion present other views or ways of looking at the material. Reading connects people (Helen, RP, 11/02/13).

Let us consider what reading means to the participants by first exploring how they have become to see themselves as readers. Unpacking memories of reading, specifically with teachers, offers a glimpse into the journey of becoming readers as knowledge is constructed from experience through reflection (Merrill, 1992). Reflecting on who they are as readers is helpful to see what is gained from reading individually as well as helping me to understand the appeal to commit to reading collectively in the space of a book club.

Early recollections of reading

“Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”

(Neil Gaiman, author of *Coraline*)

Storied experiences constitute the ways teachers make sense of and theorize their pedagogy (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kooy, 2006). Early recollections of reading, as part of this storied experience, form the starting point of attitudes that inform how teachers approach and practice reading in the classroom (Clark & Medina, 2000; Daisey, 1996, 2010; Morawski, 1989, 1993, 2008; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995; Strong-Wilson, 2006). Teacher education programs advocate reflection as an integral lens through which aspiring teachers should conceptualize their past, present and future learning and teaching narratives. While reflection is an undeniable essential aspect of teaching, I have unfortunately overheard teacher education students refer to such practice the “*R*” word as they felt *reflection* was discussed and obliged ad nauseam. However, reflecting on who we are as teachers is critical: “teachers just don’t appear out of thin air. They are products—as well as active agents—of the worlds from which they came” (Greenleaf, Jimenez & Roller, 2002, p. 497). Furthermore, Greene (1994) posits that many teachers have begun to realize that they can best reach students “against the background of their own life stories, their own narratives. Narratives, we have come to realize, are the means by which we gradually impart meaning to the events of our lives” (p. 14). Through the telling of stories both teachers and students make sense of who they are and construct ways of being members of a classroom. Teachers can learn about students’ connections to other social aspects of their lives and find connections to their own personal stories. Students use stories, to “shape and reshape their lives, imagining what could have or should have happened, as well as what did” (Dyson & Genishi, 1994, p. 2).

Reading recollections are an important layer in unpacking one's reading experience for teachers and students alike. Certain memories are selected and teased out apart from others which in itself, speaks to how some experiences can be seen as more formative than others (Strong-Wilson, 2006). As previously stated in the methodology chapter, I believe that memories about early events are often easier to write as a reflection as opposed to answering questions during an interview. Further, the mode of storytelling repositions the participants as an active agent and co-participants in dialogue (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The participants' reading interest profiles help me to understand the storied experiences that have shaped their reading identities and future reading habits.

Braiding the story lines of the collective narratives of reading memories offers a sense of how my participants have experienced reading, forming a fundamental layer of their teaching narratives. The scope in experiences is of interest, ranging from fond memories of being read to as a child to a poignant hatred of reading, faking it in school, and (re)discovering a love of books later in life. Not surprisingly, tensions arose in some participants' memories between in and out-of-school reading experiences as they describe their first perceptions of how they became to understand themselves as readers. Invoking Rosenblatt's (1938/1995, 1978, 1982) transactional theory of reading as a lens, oscillating between aesthetic and efferent approaches to reading, I unpack the participants' articulated memories of transacting with books as a way to start the discussion of how the connections they make to what they read. Rosenblatt encourages readers, and in this case, teachers, to draw on their literary experiences as the basis for self-understanding which, in turn, informs their current pedagogical beliefs.

Fond memories of reading

While many of my participants fondly describe their earliest recollection of reading, some also share struggles and obstacles, and others only shared negative memories and associations with reading. Fond memories usually involved being read to by a parent—a principal force often positively associated with early literacy (Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995)—as was the case for nine of my participants. Some remember specific titles of books and stories while others intimately describe sensations such as textures, senses and feelings, surrounding the lived experience of the reading event. Diana remembers her mother reading *Grimm's Fairy Tales* in her pre-school years and Isabella remembers at age four reading *A Fish Out of Water* and *Go Dog Go* with her father. The following quotes are taken from the reading interest profile, presented in the participants' words to authentically capture their stories, as “hallmarks of knowing in narrative inquiry” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25).

I remember loving *Barbapapa* books with the pictures and imagining how they changed shape. I remember a box of books that was at a friend's house and the special chair we sat in with her dad to read the books. (Anne, RP, 21/11/12)

Being read to by my mother—sitting on the couch in the daytime with a baby in my mother's arms (I have 12 siblings) and she was reading to me. The book was likely a fairy tale book we have in German (my mother's first language and nationality).

(Kathleen, RP, 11/06/13)

At age four or five, I remember climbing into bed with my Holly Hobby doll tucked under my arm, anxiously clutching a collection of nursery rhymes, waiting for one of parents (usually my hard-working mother) to read a bedtime story. I don't remember having the privilege of many books at this age but I had this one collection that must have

had dozens of nursery rhymes. It was a time for my tired, working mother and I to share; a calming nighttime ritual, to chase away the monsters lingering in the closet or under the bed. (Jenn, RP, 20/10/12)

Bonding with an adult in these shared memories is an significant recollection, evidenced by similar findings in previous studies' (Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995, Daisey, 2010; Strong Wilson, 2006) as well as by the popular claim that being read to by a parent (or adult) is a strong precursor of creating life-long readers (Aldana & Wilks, 2010). Rosenblatt (1982) argues the transactional nature of reading allows for celebration of what children actually make of stories as opposed to focusing solely on their comprehension. In these quotes, the lived through experience was not highlighting comprehension of the text, but rather about the discovery that books can make possible an intense personal experience and one that is carried in adulthood.

Helen, Emma and Sophia recollected their palpable memories of reading under the covers, with a flashlight when lights were to be turned off. Helen describes reading *365 Bedtime Stories for Children* which she still has: "It sits proudly on the shelf in my night table beside the bed. I can recall reading it at night after lights out, likely with a flashlight under the covers" (RP, 11/02/13). Sophia remembers "being six or seven and reading under the covers at night I grew up in a very hectic household with 8 siblings so reading was a treasured time" (RP, 06/06/13) and similarly Emma's earliest memories of reading "would be reading in my bed at night with a flashlight when I suppose to be sleeping. I was probably around 8 or 9 when I started that" (RP, 18/02/13). These small yet significant acts can be seen as rebellious rituals of reading, subtly defying parents in the adult world to continue their lived experience in the new worlds and possibilities accessible through their imaginations and the reading of children's literature.

Some participants recall playful memories, like Rose: “my father would pick a word for me and I would have to find it in *The Sunday New York Times*” leading to a “LOVE [emphasis in original] of spelling tests and word games” (RP, 02/04/13). Both Anne and Charlotte write about trips to the library with very distinct features in each memory. Anne remembers “sitting on a big stuffed snake while the librarian read to us” while Charlotte tells of a special event at story time,

There was a huge clear bubble and a lady was doing story time inside this bubble with us sitting on mats around her on the floor. I remember it involved her reading the book, showing us pictures and then us acting out various animal parts. A fond memory indeed. (RP, 18/11/12)

The association of play with language and literature is an important one in terms of how Rose, Anne and Charlotte experienced reading as children. Beyond the joy of partaking in something that is enjoyable, play provides a way of exploring literacy and self-understandings. Although the very idea of play brings images of a magical space, free from the confines of rigidity of adult word, play itself is argued to be a contested topic (Nelson, 2010). Boldt and Salvio (2006) suggest that “play and literature are two important resources children can use to bridge the critical gap between their inner worlds and demands of school” (p. 5). Reading can be a space where agency and play collide, allowing for children to take creative steps towards learning to express themselves and make sense of their worlds. In our adult life, there are not many socially accepted forms of play that children’s fiction allows us to do. These associations of play and reading lay a foundation which encourages future readings habits, allowing for these imaginative energies to be sustained.

Place was also a common descriptor in these early memories of reading, often in cozy spaces conducive to comfort and reading for pleasure.

My other favourite times were in the summer, in the backyard lying on a picnic blanket, immersed while the sun shone. Loved the lazy, timeless feeling of anything being possible. (Sophia, RP, 06/06/13)

Reading to myself on the way home from school. Stopping in this little short cut we took through the neighbourhood, which went through a tiny but wooded lot stuck between two intersecting corners. I remember sitting on a fallen log, and reading my (grade 1?) reader to myself and feeling it was like magic—both the ability to read, and sitting in this ‘fairy lot’ (which was how we thought of it then). (Kathleen, RP, 11/06/13)

I remember having stories read to me as a child by my father each night from age four onward. All of my siblings would hop onto my parents’ king-sized bed and listen to dad read *Uncle Wiggily*. I grew up in Orillia and my parents still live in our family home, so my memories are strong when I visit them there. (Charlotte, RP, 18/11/12)

These eloquent depictions of place speak to important associations made by the participants between reading and the memories of their surroundings. These reading events occurred in places and spaces that allowed readers to live through the reading experience and transact with the text and the surroundings that they recognize and feel close to (Long, 2003). Although his work focuses on place-based writing, Jacobs (2011) argues that the intertwining and recursive nature of place, personhood, literacy and democracy not only allows for the emergence of vivid, personal and powerful experience but also provides a reason to write and (I would add) to read. Further, readers [originally written as writers] “need a way to connect their literacy to the worlds around them—to the places, people and interests that make their worlds personally meaningful” (Bangert & Brooke, 2003, p. 23). Place and people are what stand out in these quotes, evidently more so than such aptitudes as decoding text or phonemic awareness, which are commonly

emphasized in schools. These recollections speak of the powerful and meaningful connections that children form about reading as they learn to read the world before learning to read the word (Freire & Macado, 1987), setting the stage to not only actively transact with their environment, but also to take an aesthetic stance towards reading. “For while a book ends, the story, if it has any resonance at all, needn’t” (Wynne-Jones, 1998, p.165).

As I read and reread these emotively described narratives, I found myself drawn to the choice of endearing words that were used to describe how they felt and feel about reading: *LOVED, fell in love, felt a sense of pride, thrill, meditative, doing something good for myself, inspiring, magic, afterglow, riveting. A luxury, a comfort, a tool, a treat, a sense of decadence.* These descriptions symbolize the personal attachments to the stories and the valued experience that the participants attribute to reading, as an event that is held in high regard, cherished and genuine. Applying Strong-Wilson’s (2006) concept of a touchstone—a stone that was used to test the purity of gold and silver—these stories act as familiar markers that are used to judge the worth of other stories and experiences. Weaving in Dewey’s (1961) notion of continuity, meaning that experiences grow out of one another, leading us to lead to future experiences, these fond memories of reading are ones that are returned to and relived in a sense with each reading event. Having these positive lived through experiences with reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) not only sets the stage for a life time of reading enjoyment but also lays the foundation for landscapes of learning (Greene, 1978). Many of us have a plethora of memories of learning experiences, tucked away in our mental filing cabinets, but it is these particular fond recollections of reading that participants chose to share which contextualize their experience and as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue, context makes all the difference. These memories are a formative starting point to how these participants began to see themselves as readers.

Isabella enjoyed “escaping to other worlds, such as the world inhabited by *Anne Green of Gables* or the children in *The Secret Garden*” (RP, 08/03/13). Grace, recalls being addicted to *Nancy Drew*, “I still remember the titles and they give me a little thrill when I call them to mind or look at the covers again” (RP, 29/03/13). Helen adds that she liked Nancy Drew “because she exuded qualities of independence and curiosity...an independent female role model for young girls (RP, 11/02/13). Through the reading of these recollections, I was pummelled by my own nostalgic waves of early reading. Like Grace, I vividly remember being obsessed with *Nancy Drew*. I must have been about 9 or 10 years old and it was the first time I had spent a week at my aunt’s house in Toronto during the summer. Although the details of how I stumbled upon the stack of hardcover *Nancy Drew* books remain fuzzy, I can vividly remember the bright yellow hardcover, the slightly corrugated texture of the linen-based cover, tainted aged colour of the once white, thick textured pages and the musty smell when I cracked open each book that presumably sat on a bookshelf for past decades. I remember volunteering to go to bed early just to be able to squeeze in a few extra pages before my eyelids became too heavy to ignore. Although I cannot remember the details or outcomes of the stories, I remember every detail of the books themselves and the satiated way I felt when I read of Nancy’s mischievous adventures.

Not-so-fond memories

For Maria, James, Lydia, memories of reading that they shared were filled with struggles and hardships, painting a very different picture than the shared memories above. Maria was considered a late bloomer when it comes to reading,

I remember my parents put me in a private school to learn and they used to make us listen to classical music while reading, or listen to books on tape, and answer questions into

tape recorder. I was just 'ugh'. I often felt that I wasn't a good reader, and this feeling probably stayed with me all the way until I reached university. (RP, 07/04/13).

As stated in the excerpt from Maria's reading interest profile, she found reading in school to be rigid and focused on comprehension questions designed to be answered by one correct answer with very little discussion. Failing Grade 9 English and subsequently taking summer school in order to catch up to her peers, Maria felt, not surprisingly, "turned off reading." Positive associations with reading only began to develop while studying linguistics at university with exposure to different authors.

I felt that the professors really went into the symbolism of the texts, the biographies of the authors (which influenced their writings), etc. This is when I felt that reading and literature were very interesting, and I started to understand the correlation between history (or at least the author's history) and the subject of the text...and I was taught that is it OK to have my own opinion/interpretation of what I am reading." (RP, 07/04/13)

It is noteworthy to mention that Maria was the one of the two participants who voiced during the interview that even though she now reads regularly, she never considered herself to be "a reader."

Although James admits that he saw himself as a good student, he also remembers hating reading as a child and even describes faking it in school,

In Grade 6 I remember reading my first novel *Murder on the Canadian* by Eric Wilson...it took me ages and I enjoyed it, and I also remember a great sense of accomplishment when I finished it, but it didn't make me a reader – subsequent books I faked or finished without enjoying. I struggled and generally did not do exceptionally well – English was most likely my poorest mark. I hated the stuff they made us read for

the most part – Shakespeare, short stories, tales of woe on the Canadian prairies...etc. In high school I read everything put in front of me, but only because I was a good student, not because I liked reading. (RP, 24/03/13)

It was only by taking a Canadian Literature course in university, much like Maria's experience, where James began to enjoy reading. Similarly, Lydia does not consider herself an early reader. She remembers being read to as a child, although she does not elaborate on this experience like other participants. Instead, Lydia explains that while she enjoyed books "forced" on her by high school English teachers, she admits that she only began to enjoy reading for pleasure after high school.

After my first year of University, I had returned home for the summer and was going through a break up. My best friend at the time had referred me to *Oryx and Crake*, by Margaret Atwood to fill my alone time at home. During this period, I had realized that I loved sinking into a good book and letting myself be lost in another world where I did not have to think, I only had to enjoy the story in front of me. (RP, 07/04/13)

Of interest is that neither Maria, nor James, nor Lydia mentions any pre-school or home recollections of reading as all of the memories they chose to share are negative memories of school-based literacy practices. Such storied experiences play an important role in perceptions of their reading selves.

While Anne, Charlotte and Diana earlier voiced affectionate memories of reading, all three individuals also describe struggling with texts at various points in their lives. Anne shared her struggles with spelling which resulted in attending a remedial class in Grade 6. She also admits that although she loved being read to, she wasn't the type of person who lost herself in a book: "[i]t felt like a lot of work and I was happy to do other things" (RP, 21/11/12). Charlotte

confesses that she wasn't much of a reader nor was reading something "that grabbed her in school....I did what I had to for school book reports and novel studies (RP, 18/11/12). Similarly, Diana did not enjoy reading in school and her love of reading only developed as an adult. For these five participants, enjoying reading was something that they developed outside of the confines of the public (meaning K-12) classroom.

In light of the burgeoning discussion in current literature of the gap between school literacies and out of school literacies (Aldana & Wilks, 2010; Alvermann 2001; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001) these findings speak to the way that classroom culture (i.e. mandated curriculum and transmissive notions of reading) can sometimes dim the joy of reading. Rosenblatt (1982) agrees and argues that failure to recognize the two stances of reading—efferent and aesthetics—is the root of how literature is perceived in the classroom. Furthermore, she contends that in teaching literature the primary responsibility should be encouraging the aesthetic stance. Efferent stances on reading are often pushed in school due to the emphasis on testing the quantifiable products of reading. However "understanding the transactional nature of reading would correct the tendency of adults to look only at the text and the author's presumed intention, and to ignore as irrelevant what the children actually do make of it" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 272). Further, "aesthetic reading, by its very nature, has an intrinsic purpose, the desire to have a pleasurable, interesting experience for its own sake" (p. 275), the repercussions of which are to likely engage in further reading. Readers carry the lived through experience to the next reading event, exemplified in both the fond and not-so-fond memories articulated by the participants. These experiences form a fundamental layer in both their reading and teaching lives.

Memorable Literacy Teachers

Guided by both previous studies that target early recollections of teachers and my memories of teachers that have profoundly affected my teaching practice, I explored memorable teachers that may have played a significant role in my participants' reading experiences and associations. Responses range from parents to post-secondary educators, reflecting the diverse range of memorable literacy teachers in early studies (Morwaski & Brunhuber, 1995; Daisey, 1996, 2010). The connections made to those who encouraged reading play a significant role in the shaping of future reading, and arguably teaching, practices.

Anne and Sophia cite their mothers as their most memorable literacy teachers. Sophia remembers her mother who could quote poetry by heart; a practice that Sophia has continued to embody. Anne, who struggled at becoming a reader, remembers her mother who "was always so patient with me and my reading. She spent so much time with me...correcting my spelling, and made me talk it through with her each time" (RP, 21/11/12). Both Isabella and Rose recall their respective Grade 2 teachers, "who made books sound exciting and wonderful" (RP, 08/03/13). As an English major, Rose reveals that she has had great teachers but "Mrs. [name] was just an all-around supportive person who made me feel like I could do anything. I just attacked books of all sorts and never looked back" (RP, 02/04/13). These memories are laden with support, patience and excitement about reading, crucial to one's reading identity is these formative years.

Nearly half of the participants recall their senior high school English teachers as most memorable, with such common descriptors as passionate, knowledgeable and motivating. For Helen, it was her Grade 11/12 Latin teacher to whom she attributes her affinity of language: "I respected her for her expertise and knowledge as a teacher" (RP, 11/02/13). Kathleen, whose

mother is German, recalls her Grade 13 teacher's inclusive approach to teaching as both intensely personal and meaningful.

I think he was my most memorable literacy teacher because, in teaching us Canadian literature, it was the first time that I consciously remember feeling validated as a Canadian through the study of our literature, as well as discovering *our* firm rooting in this landscape. This has firmly planted the idea that the strongest experiences somehow help reflect a bit of who you are, while discovering something else. (RP, 11/06/13)

Lydia describes her Grade 9 English teacher as having “a no nonsense attitude [which] allowed us all to appreciate topics like Shakespeare and it was her that truly taught me how to write essays. She was a tough marker and forced me to push myself” (RP, 07/04/13). Comparable in both descriptions and content, Charlotte recalls her Grade 11 teacher as “an extremely passionate woman who taught me the proper way to write an essay. She also exposed me to the beauty of Shakespeare and had some novels on her required reading list that were very poignant in my understanding of the world” (RP, 18/11/12). Conversely, reading Shakespeare for James was a different story, a far cry from beauty and poignancy.

So many memories of literacy teachers were always negative...In Grade 13 our English teacher handed us King Lear and said: “read it, you have a test in 3 weeks”. In previous years we had always read through the Shakespeare stuff together and broke it down.....I remember being panicked – got the Coles notes, rented the movie etc., still hardly understood a word. Hated every minute of that class!! (RP, 24/03/13)

With such an approach to Shakespeare which is known to be a difficult feat for many students (McMillan & Wilhelm, 2007; Townsend, 1998), it is not surprising that James did not discover his love for reading until adult life. This story resonates with me as I have very vivid memories

of despising *Macbeth* and virtually all books read in my Grade 11 English class. I found the teacher's approach to teaching literature rigid and suffocating, sprinkled with monotony and ennui. In stark contrast, I remember loving *Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet* in earlier grades because these were approached by teachers who embodied a very passionate, enthusiastic and animated reading of the plays.

The remaining four participants could not recall any literacy teacher that was memorable. For some, this was admitted with dismal undertones and Diana writes "Sadly, I don't remember one literacy teacher as standing out or making an impression on me. I would say my B.Ed. Language teacher [name] made a greater impression (and inspired me) more than any other teacher". (RP, 19/11/12). Emma likens her lack of a memorable teacher to her dismal reading experiences, of which only positively developed in university. For others, like Maria, the tone is indifferent "[t]here were teachers that I enjoyed more than others but not one that sticks out as an amazing teacher" (RP, 07/04/13). Grace sees herself as her own memorable literacy teacher and partly attributes her ability to recognize "good literature" to belonging to a book club.

I didn't have any really memorable teachers to tell you the truth and my parents aren't readers – in fact, I've influenced my mom to start reading now. I think being in my book club had me focus more on the value of good literature and I also think in a way I've been my most effective literacy teacher in that all my years of analysis of the classics like *Lord of the Flies*, *Macbeth*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* etc. have made me more aware of what to listen/look for. When you teach, you learn. (RP, 29/03/13)

The notion of reading 'good' literature is a common goal amongst book clubs and one that I will explore in the following section/chapter.

Unpacking Early Recollections of Reading

These early recollections of reading are filled with intricate details to which participants ascribe meaning and value. Narrative inquiry contends that there is no other reality than the reality that the narrator is narrating and the truth/s of these stories are “embedded in its details, not its generalization” (Grumet, 2004, p. 92). It is here where I attempt to make sense of the participants’ responses and create a collective narrative of patterns thread through these articulations, remembering that research is messy and non-linear (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

All of the positive memories were described through personal connections to the text, to others and/or to places: escaping into worlds of characters, being read to by parents or librarians, hiding under the covers with flashlights and basking in the sun on timeless summer day. Many of these stories were crafted in a nostalgic manner, exemplified by Helen’s comment “I’m smiling as I write this” (RP, 11/02/13). For many participants, early reading was about pleasure, denoted a sense of accomplishment and creating multiple worlds to be explored: none of which was connected to school-based reading. These experiences were meaningful, conjuring images of magical worlds of children’s literature, far from the confines of basal reading practices which tend to dominate in schools today.

Drawing on the work of reader-response to help frame these recollections, Rosenblatt (1978) posits that memory and curiosity are traits which readers bring to text. Creativity and curiosity are two main facets of an idea and each experience we have that taps into these facets will likely propel future ideas and experiences. It is experience and reflection on experience, according to Dewey (1933/1986), that is the main driver of inquiry. Meaningful early reading experiences through stories create conditions that would likely encourage future reading experiences as these memories are relived and brought into subsequent reading events. Highly

favourable messages about reading were created in these events, building a fundamental layer that helped to shape the participants reading identities and conceptions about literacy.

Going back to Grumet's (2004) notion of truth embedded in detail, these early recollections lacked any particularities about school. In the descriptions of memorable literacy teachers, all of the recollections involved how reading and/or text was presented and approached: with excitement, patience and knowledge/expertise. For others, like James, Maria and Lydia, reading was positioned as an act that needed to be completed and forced, indicative of a skills based approach to reading and one that proponents of reader-response aim to de-emphasize in schools (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978, 1982) Perhaps not surprisingly, many negative memories of reading were associated with reading in or for school: struggles with spelling, failing grades, writing book reports, faking reading, being forced to read books, restricting expectations, and little personal connection to the assigned text. This disconnect between school-based and personal reading can be viewed in light of the vast amount of scholars who have argued for decades that there is not only a gap between school-based and personal literacies, it is widening at an alarming rate (Alim, 2011; Daisey, 1996, 2010; Knoester, 2009; Moje, 1996; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978, 1982, 1991). It would take an entire thesis to theorize the conditions that perpetuate this disconnect but some key reasons that relate to this study are: constructions of literacy and struggling readers (Alvermann, 2001; Cox & Hopkins, 2006; Gee, 1999), lack of diversity in reading materials (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Faulkner, 2005), neglecting an aesthetics stance of reading (Rosenblatt, 1982), teachers' perceptions of themselves as aliterates or non-readers (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Cremin, et.al, 2009; Darwin, 2006), and transmissive literacy pedagogies (Freebody & Freiberg, 2001; Manna &

Misheff, 1987), all of which set the stage for the stifling of personal literacies by school-based, skill focused literacy practices entrenched in schools.

Further drawing on Rosenblatt's work to help frame these responses, the transactional approach to reading can shed light on these early recollections. As previously discussed, Rosenblatt (1978) distinguishes between aesthetic and efferent reading in terms of the reader's focus. To reiterate, during aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is on what is being lived through during the relationship with the text whereas in efferent reading, the attention is given to what can be taken away after the reading event. The application of this theory to frame reading practices of teachers results in some interesting findings that illuminate the importance of meaning construction, and teachers reading identities. Studies done by Applegate & Applegate (2004) and Ruddell (1995) found that teachers who adopt an aesthetic approach to reading—often paralleled to embodying enthusiasm towards reading—use practices that are more conducive to reading enjoyment. In these classrooms, meaning is constructed through negotiation and framed as a fluid and flexible process, bred by such practices as read alouds, diversity of student texts, opportunity for students to transact with text and others, creating a community of readers. More efferent approaches to reading that are, arguably, emphasized in literacy classroom are conceptualized as the process of looking for something rather than allowing it to happen (Schwartz, 1996), and teaching young readers to approach the next text with the same stance. These studies further suggest teachers who take a more efferent approach to reading will likely perpetuate reading practices in the classroom to conform to their beliefs about reading, manifested in such practices as factual questions, book reports and responses to texts that focus more about comprehension than meaning.

Similar findings on research conducted specifically on early recollections of reading by Morawski & Brunhuber (1995) and Daisey (2010) suggest teachers who have positive memories of early reading experiences are more likely to convey favourable messages about reading to future students. However, these studies also suggest that readers who struggled with reading may be better equipped to empathize with students who may also struggle. Both studies caution teachers to be open and sensitive to students who may have different experiences, in order to avoid misreading signs of students' (dis)engagement with reading. Simply put, teachers' early experiences of reading have implications for future teaching, as evidenced by research that urges teachers to unpack their early reading experiences.

Rosenblatt (1978), Sumara (1996, 1997) and others alike would agree that reading is an act of identity making, transacting with the text, our surroundings, and past experiences which shapes our identity for the future. "Our interaction with books is relational and participates in the ever evolving experience of personal identity" (Sumara, 1997, p. 227). Scholars who have unpacked teachers' early recollections (Beers, 2003; Daisey, 1996, 2010; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995; Ruddell, 1995; Nathanson, Pruslow & Levitt, 2008; Sumara, 1996, 1997) argue that more needs to be known about personal reading in teachers lives and I certainly concur. There is, however, hope which lies in research documenting ways in which the personal literacies of students (Knoester, 2009) and teachers are entering the classroom, creating conditions that support meaningful and engaging reading practices.

Chapter Summary

By exploring how the participants have come to see themselves as readers, these early recollections of reading add to my understandings of what reading means to the participants. The range in memories of reading is noteworthy as half of participants describe struggling with

reading at some point in their lives. Many of these struggles were associated with reading for or in school, highlighting the earlier discussion of tension between in school and out of school literacies. These selectively shared memories offer a glimpse into the foundations of reading which potentially enter the classroom. Unpacking the kinds of associations the participants have with reading is helpful to see what is gained from reading individually as well as helping me to understand the appeal to join and commit to book club membership.

BOOK CLUB MEMBERSHIP: “IT’S THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY MONTH”

“After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.”
(Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*)

Unpacking reasons the participants articulated for joining and remaining in book clubs allows me to glean understandings of both how they use the club and the effect of the club on their reading identities. The aforementioned discussion of early recollections of reading underscores how participants have viewed (and continue to view) themselves as readers, half of which disclosed struggling at some point in their reading journey. Some, like Maria and Anne, even admit that they currently do not see themselves as “big readers.” I find this beyond fascinating in my quest to understand why participants with varying struggles in their reading background join, and remain in, book clubs. The desire to talk with others about books is the obvious reason, but as Long (2003) found in her longitudinal study on book clubs “simply reporting what each thought about a book almost entirely misses the point of why the participants are there at all” (p.114). An overriding sentiment expressed in interviews and reading interest profiles was that participants perceived their respective book clubs are “about so much more than the book” (Diana, I, 13/11/12). There must be more going on in this provocative and intimate space to appeal to readers, some of whom don’t even see themselves as avid readers.

The Main Appeal: Aim and Goals of Joining and Remaining in a Book Club

Rosenblatt (1978) reminds us that “there is an element of creativity in even the simplest reading act” (p. 51). Reading is an integral part of life for all the participants, seen as valuable and thought provoking. Although reasons for joining and remaining in a club cannot be easily separated from one another, the social component, intellectual stimulation, and motivation to

read were the most commonly cited. All thirteen participants agree the main appeal to joining a club is inherently social; a way to connect the joys of reading within a community of readers. Whether members of the book clubs are from the same neighbourhood, friends, co-workers or random acquaintances, participants commonly referred to their clubs as a means of connecting with people who are often at similar stages in their lives. While there are varying perspectives on how committed each participant feels to their respective clubs, they all maintain an active level of membership. Both Charlotte and Anne admit that their club's main goal is getting together with those in their neighbourhood.

I would say generally, it's a chance to get together above anything else, right? It's interesting because again I really feel like because so many of us are moms and that's really reflected in the things that we talk about and it also influences the choices that we pick. (Charlotte, I, 12/10/12)

The format of this particular club is intriguing and adds to the discussion of book clubs as spaces of social connections. As briefly discussed in the participant profiles, this club skips reading a book every third month—a fact that is kept from their husbands—but members still meet at Anne's place. The setting is the same; members bring baked treats, enjoy a warm cup of steeped tea and settle around the wood stove for a night of talk and laughter. Without a book to ground the discussion, members still feel the need to come together once a month, reaffirming the social agenda of the book club. This sentiment is voiced by other participants, particularly ones that have belonged to a book clubs for many years. Helen comments “I think it gives the get-together a focus other than sitting around complaining, gossiping...we needed something else to focus on” (Helen, I, 13/01/13). Similarly, Diana reflects on her club that just celebrated their 10 year anniversary:

We all kind of joke that maybe that was more serious requirement in the early years but we've all come to realize that it's not the priority, and that's all part of the evolution of how it's come to be more of a little refuge for moms to get away for one night a month...I hosted the last book club just at the end of October and my two friends, I have one of those sectional couches and they were all cuddled together in the corner...with their little glasses of wine and all, and the fire was going. It was one of those cold nights, and one pulled up the blanket and said "I love book club" [laugh]. And it didn't seem to be about the book in that moment, you know? (I, 13/11/12)

James, whose book club recently disbanded at the time of interview, had an interesting insight into the importance of connecting with others. During the interview, James considered himself an avid reader, citing that he always read books in addition to those required in his book club. When I inquired if he had any interest in either instigating or joining another club, his reply was as follows:

I have a friend and...she's a member of a book club at her local library and I thought of that but again there's no social reward in that because everyone would be a complete stranger and then everyone who goes every month would be different...She said there could be 200 people signed up for the book club, and in any given month, only eight people show up and every month there's a different eight people so you never really get to know anyone. I do miss my book club but I still read so I think the reason I miss it, to be honest with you, is the social aspect of it. (I, 23/03/13)

This comment illuminates the social power of book club membership, despite James being an voracious reader on his own accord. As previously stated, I felt a disconnect with James, partly due to the constricting dynamic of a telephone interview, but also partly to his insistence that

belonging to a book club had little effect on his reading and teaching practices. I feel it noteworthy to mention that it was only after this comment that I felt that James's interview took a more positive or a more insightful turn. Prior to this moment, our interview was comparable to what I imagine speed dating is like: awkward questions garnering little insight; short, concise answers with an air of annoyance (exemplified by the response: "I don't know. That is a really awkward question...") and both parties anxiously waiting for the buzzer to end this contrived meeting. However, once James opened up about how he missed his book club, I felt much more comfortable and confident that the interview was meaningful for both of us: an exchange of stories more than a research interview. This could be what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mean as "narrative threads coalescing" and the "merging of temporal flows as researchers and participants meet in their inquiry field" (p. 70). I carried this experience with me to my remaining interviews, acknowledging the many layers and shapes that storied narratives can take.

Both Maria and Grace belong to clubs that are mainly composed of teachers who had previously taught at the same school. As briefly mentioned, Maria's club started as a way to keep in touch with colleagues who were parting separate ways.

It was the year when a lot of the teachers left the school and we were thinking of a way of how we could get together so the social was the big thing because we all got along and then we figured we'll *do* a book club and that would be a good way for us to get together.
(I, 26/03/13)

This notion is echoed by both Emma and Grace, who see the social aspect of their respective clubs as even more prominent now due the change in life stages of some of the members,

I would say we're almost half retired now from teaching so we can't just talk about work when we get there. It is meant now, I think, also to help us keep in touch with the ones

that have left teaching, with our community that has left. Truly, I wouldn't keep in touch if we didn't have book club and we were good friends! (Grace, I, 05/02/13)

What these quotes exemplify is that the perceived agenda and appeal to join and maintain book club membership is inherently social. Although not a surprising finding given both the social aspect of reading and clubs in general, it is the meaning that these connections have to the participants that is warranted and noteworthy to how they conceptualize reading as both an active, social process and a means to stay connected to people. Meeting every four to six weeks with the same people to discuss books is an evocative experience that participants do not otherwise have in their everyday lives. Sedo (2011) argues that both the act of reading and belonging to a book club are community building exercises, which do not otherwise exist in the lives of the members. Further, book club membership “represents in itself a form of critical reflection of society or one’s place within in, because it demands taking a stance toward a felt lacuna in everyday life and moving toward addressing this gap” (Long, 2003, p. 92). Many of the participants in my study admit that they would not connect with the members in their respective clubs if it was not for their prescheduled monthly meetings. To this extent, the book clubs create a community of readers and one that the participants stay committed to month after month, year after year. In this sense, the book clubs can be seen as filling in the gaps (Iser, 1978) that exist in their reading lives.

The notion of community begs the question of who can, and cannot, belong to such a community. As the book club grows, unique processes and cultures are created to which new members are not always welcomed. For most participants, their clubs consist of a group of core members with one or two added or withdrawn along the way. Both Helen and Lydia were gratefully welcomed by one of the founding members into their respective clubs well after its

inception. As previously mentioned in the participants' profiles, Grace considered her membership as "sort of a special disposition" as she was the only member who was not centrally located in Ottawa. Conversely, Ann and Charlotte both admit to intentionally refraining from discussing their book clubs within the larger community in an attempt to keep their club small. When I asked if the members have always been the same, Anne reflects:

We've just kept it quiet and on the-down-low... in the beginning, I remember someone saying something like 'oh, you have a book club?' And it was glossed over and since then, we just don't really talk about it unless you are one on one, but that's my sense....now that I think about it, it's kind of like this unwritten thing that we've all just decided and there's never been talk about someone else entering...It's just that this is the club and this is how it works. And the community out there is very inclusive. Normally, gatherings are big or whatever but I think the idea is that it could get way too big and if one person comes in, then how do you say no to another? (I, 29/10/12)

Maintaining or monitoring the groups' dynamics by resisting new members is important to the members of this club. Anne's and Charlotte's comments reflect how important the social dynamic is to maintaining a club's vitality and keeping the space protected. Emma agrees, admitting "I think it's the camaraderie of us together and that we've been together for a long time. I think we had the right mix too because everybody's really stuck through it and they're quite committed" (I, Emma, I, 07/01/13). Sophia adds insight into Emma's notion of the right mix of people,

And there's also the question of who you want to invite into your book club because it depends on who you invite, it can skew things and sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes it's not what you wantWhen you're talking about the ideas or the

experiences in books and things like that, it is very personal so you really do need a group that what you're saying is going to be listened to... that is probably the most critical part of book club, is that you are not judged for what you're saying or what your opinion is. So, it really demands the respect everyone in the group so it's a tricky mix I think. (I, 08/04/13)

The desire to keep a book club intimate, albeit separate from a larger community, has been proposed by some as an attempt to maintain a degree of what Bourdieu's (1984) refers to as social distinction (Long, 2003; Devlin-Glass, 2001). Both practically and conceptually, reading groups create boundaries that separate members from the larger populace due to a shared investment in reading literature and sharing life experiences. In these aforementioned studies, readers are positioned as active agents, with their participation in club discussions adding to their cultural capital and distinguishing themselves as literate and intellectual citizens. Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital is defined as "accumulated knowledge, skills and advantages...giving a higher status in society which works in a system of exchange amongst most social groups" (Barker, 2004, p. 37). The participants in my study admit that they enjoy reading and discussing literature within a trusted and respected community of readers. Although maintaining the status quo of members differ, the need to protect this space by committed members is essential to the vitality of book clubs.

Social Challenges to Book Club Membership

To complicate things a little, I will address some of the social challenges that the participants felt in regards to their book club membership. One of the most articulated challenges was negotiating different personalities, which can occur in any socially intimate setting. While different perspectives are largely cited as the appeal for discussing responses to text with other

readers, many participants admit that there are sometimes clashes in opinions that can cause tension and angst amongst members. Both Kathleen and Grace jokingly admit that there is one 'character' in their respective clubs whose personality they find, at times, overwhelming. Even before I finished asking Grace if there are any challenges, she eagerly nodded in agreement and quickly replied "Oh yes: personalities." Grace confesses that one of the founding members in her club "holds court when she talks." She further speculates that one member may have left the club due to clashes with this dominant personality.

She's very interesting and entertaining in small doses, but being with her every day at lunch: she's your boss, and then you get together on the weekend when your time is so precious and this is all happening again? I mean many of us were like "aggghhhh!" [throw hands in the air gesturing frustration]. She retired three years ago and [Name of another member] left at the same time and said 'maybe if I take her there without having lunch and without her in the book club, I could come back and take her in small doses' but she's just decided she doesn't want to go back. She's happy having her free time. (I, 05/02/13)

Kathleen can relate as she explains that there is one member in her club who seems to find issue with male characters in the books they chose to read.

K: One of our characters now, I mean and I'm used to her, but it's all about the men! She doesn't like the men, right? They read *Lolita* and I mean who likes the man in that? Of course we don't like a man in that book? It's a brilliant book.

J: [laughs]. Yeah, I don't think Nabokov wants us to like the man in that book.

K: But she was so stuck on not liking the guy and me you know I was like obvious of course you don't have to, like what a great revelation about this character! (I, 02/05/13)

Embodying a more serious tone, Sophia adds that when one member was a part of her club, she felt limited in what she could disclose.

When there was one particular person in the group, I was much more cautious of things I was saying because I didn't know them well enough that I felt that I could share certain things and there's nothing wrong with that but with people a book club it's very clear what the boundaries have to be: you have to know what the boundaries are. (I, 08/04/13)

While many other participants spoke about one or two members within their respective clubs having dominant personalities, some did not find this as challenging as others. Helen admits that “sometimes one person is more vociferous than another and I tend to be the quiet one at one of these times, but I don't see that as a challenge” (I, 13/01/13). Isabella similarly contemplates the dynamics in her club, sharing “there was one gal who was sort of dominant and I bet you probably hear that a lot. I mean I was aware of it. I don't know if I found it a challenge but it was just sort of there” (I, 14/02/13).

Dealing with personalities that are less than agreeable seems to be a challenge that the participants overcome, or at least cope with individually and collectively, in order to continue and enjoy their book club membership. Long (2003) found that reading groups typically discourage domination and generally attempt to display an egalitarian ethos where all members have an equal chance to talk. By the very nature that clubs are voluntary and members are invested, clubs appear to work through and negotiate certain ‘dominating characters’ to sustain a productive group dynamic. The alternative to negotiating powerful differences seems to result in members leaving, illustrated by both Grace’s speculative story and Diana’s experiences of

leaving one club to start another. I can relate as until recently, my current book club had a ‘character’ who ended up leaving due to an apparent scheduling conflict. This well-spoken and well-read woman consistently dominated the discussions to the point of awkwardness and it was obvious that some members felt like they were being personally attacked. Upon reflection, the founder of our club sent out an email regarding our subsequent meeting and jocularly suggested that she bring her talking stick, which she sometimes uses in her classroom, to ensure that everyone has the chance to speak. We all responded in favour of the idea, even the member in question, but the talking stick failed to make an appearance at the next meeting. I speculate that the mere mention of such a moderating device was enough to bring the shape back to what Long refers to as egalitarian ethos. Consequently, this member ended up departing from the club and the discussion of the talking stick has since ceased.

Intellectual Stimulation

Historically, book clubs have been viewed as learning opportunities, predominantly for women, which were not available in the traditional education system. This disposition lingers on in recent book club research (Long, 2003; Sedo, 2004) and reflected in the majority of the participants’ admission that they seek the kind of intellectual stimulation that is not found in other facets of their lives. One of the overriding patterns I found prominent across the data is the desire to seek new knowledge and learning opportunities but the resistance to have the shape of learning even resemble structured education. While participants enjoy delving into the histories, narratives and different worlds that books offer, there is strong sense they want this learning space to remain a site of pleasure.

Lydia, the youngest participants in the study, appreciates the time and space to talk to other twenty-something women who like to read:

It's kind of like our escape from reality and allows us to just still be intellectual women talking about something important to them and at the same time having fun. A lot of these girls, and it's only girls, and a lot of these girls are doing a masters or this, that and the other thing, and when they do get the chance to read the book they just enjoy their time and enjoy talking about it and it's a lot of girl time too, like everybody loves the social aspect of just talking about something that they love and that is the great appeal for it. (I, 03/03/13)

Rose, reflecting on her club that has been in operation for 18 years, similarly expresses “It’s really cool [because] it’s just the only thing I know about them. It’s really a nice, fun evening talk about things that I don’t normally talk about but I don’t want it to be like homework. I want to look forward to going” (I, 26/03/13). This resistance to homework resonated with me as I recalled from my brief encounter of belonging to a book club with an agenda that felt more like a graduate seminar than a social reading event (c.f. Introduction). The notion of talking about reading that is separate from formal education gives credence to the overriding desire for participants to keep book club as a hobby. While participants enjoy the intellectual stimulation of transacting with text, and talking about the transaction, they want to distance their book clubs from the confines of school. This was further highlighted by Anne’s earlier sentiment (c.f. Participant Profiles) that her club often does not talk about the book enough. All participants speak proudly that their respective clubs do not subscribe to the more serious, studious practice that “other” clubs may have, which bear the less than favourable resemblance of school.

Sophia admits that in her book club, which she incidentally and appropriately refers to as an *idea* club, ideas are what sparks and drives the discussion.

So it's very much a loose book club in the sense that we talk about what we're reading and what things that we're reading are inspiring to us at the moment and how we're thinking about it, how we are using it and we see what springs off of each other. It's a much more creative sort of way of looking at the ideas and sometimes they have more application than others. (I, 08/04/13)

Throughout the interview, Sophia spoke with passion and excitement about the kinds of discussions that ensue in her club, all about ideas to incite both creativity and productivity. One example shared was that the club read *Women who Run With the Wolves* (Estés, 1996), described on *goodreads.com* as a Jungian analyst's "exploration of the feminine psyche through stories of wild woman—the mythical archetype of the strong, primitive woman" (n.d.). The group decided that instead of partaking in the typical book club discussion, they would bring in their creative responses to the book. While Sophia admits she found it difficult to connect with this particular book, she explains one member's creation:

She ended up creating...a battle coat that was an expression of the things that have happened to her. So there was like a slit down the back when she felt in many ways that she'd been knifed in the back but then out of that, she created a tree that sort of grew from that. So there have been very creative responses to books and we were sort of heading in that direction and every now and again, that so that's what we do. (I, 08/04/13)

Bringing Rosenblatt's (1978) theory of transactional reading to the forefront, I see this as the epitome of a creative aesthetic response to text, dismantling boundaries of the inner and outer world, and a new way of knowing is created. Although this is only one example of creative expression, the tangibility or concreteness of this battle coat also illuminates the imaginative and

perceptive capabilities of the reader's contribution to and stimulus of the reading event (Iser, 1978). Aesthetically, this member drew on her past experiences of betrayal as she read stories about powerful, feminine archetypes "enter[ing] into the center of awareness, and out of these materials, [s]he selects and weaves what [s]he sees as the literary work of art" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 28).

Other examples of aesthetic readings of books are offered by Kathleen as she passionately discusses her affinity for words:

I think it's that we love words. We love different things...but we love the book. For me I love the style, like the language of it and that is what hooks me. Other people get hooked by the characters whether they like or they hate them. Others are hooked by the plot so I would say we each have a different dimension to it but we love how it takes us places, really that's what we love. We love how the book takes us into different experiences and then to have a chance to talk about it with other people and that's always good. I find if you don't like a book and you come to book club you end up having a better perspective on it and maybe you see it a little bit wider, a little bit deeper so that's really with the heart of it. (Kathleen, I, 02/05/13)

Lingering over the language and allowing books to take you places is precisely what Rosenblatt refers to as "bringing in practical knowledge, awareness of literacy conventions, a readiness to think and feel" (p. 88). Charlotte comments that many of the members in her book club "are very prolific readers and generally all of us are educated so it's good when you get some of the subtleties" (I, 12/10/12). The notion of "getting the subtleties" from the text would further imply Charlotte's intellectual stimulation gained from reading for the club, which many book club researchers (Devlin-Glass, 2001; Long, 2003; Sedo, 2004, 2011; Radway, 1983,1988) would

argue further adds to her cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Further, Charlotte draws on her past literacy experiences which act as “subliminal guides...to the details to be attended to, the kinds of organizational patterns to be evolved” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 57) in an aesthetic reading stance.

Reading a Book for the Club

As transactional theory of reading is concerned with the act or the event of reading, it is appropriate here to discuss how participants negotiate reading a book for the club in relation to reading a book of their own accord. When I asked this question during the interview, participants often paused to reflect as this may not have been something at the forefront of their thoughts about their reading practices. Some admit that they do read a book differently for the club. Diana finds reading a book that she chose for herself a very different experience. “If I’m loving it or hating it...it’s a bit anticlimactic when it ends. There’s no one to talk about it” (I, 13/11/12). As noted earlier, Isabella reads a book club book “almost through many eyes” (RP, 14/02/13) as she also considered what the members might think in relation to her reading. Others state that they take more notes, pay more attention, or feel more serious about the book, when reading for the club. This notion of a closer reading, a more considered or thoughtful reading is further exemplified in the following quotes:

I think I would read a little differently. I'm a little more self-conscious about whether I like it or not, if they're going to think 'oh God, this book is so this: it's so that. It's so dumb. It's so intense. It's so long. It's so dry. And I try and remember more controversial things because sometimes you read a book and even though it's well-written and well-reviewed and everything, you just don't like it. (Rose, I, 26/03/13)

When I read it for the club, I pay more attention to what I think about it so that I have something to say. I also pay attention to the structure of the story and I look for...the little

areas where something can be revealed, you know? I like to pick out quotes or key moments if something turns up in the plot. So does it change my perspective?...it does because you're reading for that comradeship and you're reading it with a chance to relive that book by talking about it and by exploring it more deeply, and by hearing other people's perspectives too so you can change your opinion on a book. (Kathleen, I, 02/05/13)

Despite the difference some participants feel reading for book club, Helen reminds us of the opposition to have the club resemble school.

I might take note of things that I find of interest more or a perspective that it has. I really believe that my reading should be for my pleasure so I don't want to turn the book club into school. So maybe I do take a little more notice but on the other hand but I don't turn it into a project. (I, 13/01/13)

Bringing in a transactional stance of reading here, Rosenblatt contends that much of lived through experience of text seems to occur on the periphery of consciousness as the reader's attention is focused on the shaping of the literary work. In reading for club, the attention is brought forth, possibly to forefront of consciousness as some participants admit that they read the book with the intent of discussing how they experienced the book. To this end, I see reading for a book club inevitably more of an aesthetic stance towards reading, due to the added attention that is given during the reading event.

For others, they felt that there is little distinction between how they read a book for the club or for their leisure. However, both Anne and Maria see the fact that they read more because of the club *is* the distinguishing factor in how they read a book for the club as opposed to reading a book for their pleasure. This sentiment is exemplified by the following quotes:

I push myself a little more because I would usually just read a page or two and I would tap out so I'm reading more which is the difference. I don't feel pressure to think of something brilliant to say so I don't think I read it with a hugely different lens but I do follow through more to make sure that I get it read. (Anne, I, 29/10/12)

Sometimes when I start reading a book and I just think you know this is really boring I might not continue but if it's for the book club that I might finish the book so I guess that's the difference. (Maria, I, 26/03/13)

Motivation to Read

All participants admit that reading for their respective book clubs expands their breadth and depth of reading, often giving members an “excuse to read” (Maria, I, 07/01/13); an important factor for many in becoming members. In the busy life of teachers, there is not always time to justify reading for pleasure, even though all participants adamantly disclose the personal benefits that they gain from reading. Although I am cautious of the perils that statistics alone can overshadow, drawing on recent statistics can help frame this discussion. McKool and Gespass’s (2009) study on educators’ reading habits found that teachers reported spending 24 minutes per day reading for pleasure (almost three hours/week). Moreover, reading for leisure was ranked sixth (slightly above exercise) on a free time scale, with planning and grading for work ranked first. According to the *Canadian Heritage’s* 2010 study on readership in Canada, respondents reported reading at least one book for pleasure in the year preceding the study; about half (53%) reported reading daily; the average time spent reading per week was 4.5 hours (unchanged since 1991); and, the average number of books read per year was 17 (a slight decrease from 1991). Bearing in mind that statistics cannot act as a sole indicator of trends, if these numbers offer any insight into teachers reading practices, it would appear that teachers are reading for pleasure less

frequently than the average reader. If participants only read for their club, with the quintessential book club meeting occurring 8-12 times per year, typically reading one book per meeting, it is not surprising that participants embrace the club as a motivating factor to read.

While participants' attribute their respective clubs to propel them to read more frequently, it is not simply about reading *more* books, but rather reading *good* books and this distinction has significant implications. Exploring how the participants' respective clubs create their yearly book lists shed some light on the collective importance of reading quality literature. Each club has some sort of democratic method to reach a consensus on the titles to read. These methods range from an informal suggestion at the end of each month which members take turns suggesting the next month's pick to very elaborate and time consuming voting protocols. Despite the articulations of the unique book selection practices, there is strong sense that types of books chosen to read are at the heart of the club's identity: "if we are what we eat, book clubs are what they read" (Long, 2003, p. 114).

A pattern that stretched across the data was using books that have either won or been nominated for various literary awards—namely the *Scotiabank Giller*, *Pulitzer*, *Canada Reads*—as a starting point to create the club's book list. By the very nature of seeking out titles that have already been accepted as 'good' by literary critics demonstrates the collective desire to read distinguished literature. This seems to be even more explicit when members would not necessarily chose such notable works of their own accord, as in Lydia's case. During our interview, Lydia's passion for young adult fiction shone through and she even admitted to feeling, at times, like an outcast because she has a science background where most members of her club have social sciences degrees. Lydia shared her thoughts on the club's influence on her reading repertoire:

I like those ‘Sci-Fi-y’ ones that kind of go along my escape from reality kind of thing. Vampires are an escape from reality and the Hunger Games: that just doesn't happen. But these literary ones that I'm reading, I also happen to enjoy but these are books that ‘like would I actually think I would read this?’ “No” So my interests are literally split in half and I'm really glad they're kind of taking me on a different path. (I, 03/03/13)

This sentiment is shared by many participants who candidly admit that the club pushes them to read more literary works than they would through their own choice. Although Grace has an English degree and 17 years of teaching English at the senior high school level, like Lydia, she appreciates the breadth of books that the club requires.

I don't think I'd be reading as nearly as much if I didn't have the book club and I don't think I would be reading the quality of literature that I have been if I didn't have book club and I think that was the initial idea: it was to be a social thing but it also helped us to be grounded in the literary world a little bit more. (I, 05/02/13)

Kathleen's club takes one step further as her club tries to maintain a rule where each member suggests a book that she has already read to avoid the happenstance “where someone has recommended some great book and everybody's raving about it and we think ‘what is this?’” (I, 02/05/13). In this sense, the book club member herself acts as a literary authority, giving credence to the quality of the book to be read by the group. Literary authority has traditionally been held by those who exercise a certain amount of power in helping to determine what counts as part of popular literary culture. Some examples of these are the aforementioned literary awards, as well as editors of media sites as discussed by Radway (1988) in her study on New York's *The Book-of-the-Month-Club*. Radway both theorizes and problematizes the tenacious relationship between literacy, social and economic development. Editors use criteria

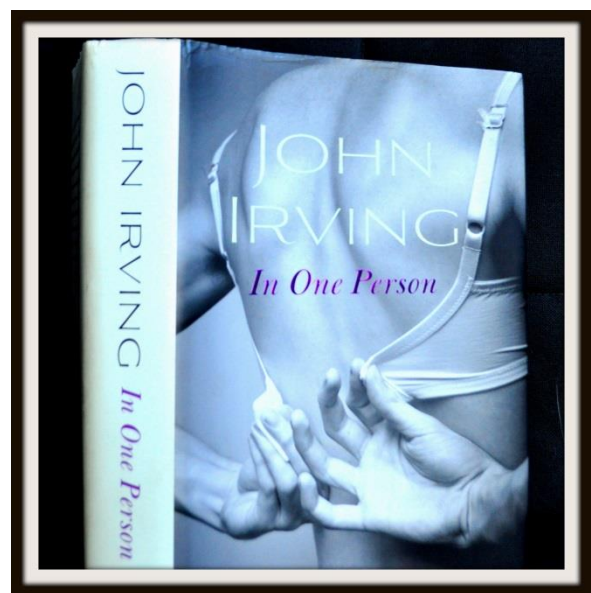
contradictory to their 'educated' tastes to evaluate manuscripts which intentionally spur the club's members to purchase the chosen titles. In this sense, the literary authority of the club is strongly tied to economic gains by the publishing industry, "combining commercial goals with a concern for quality" (p. 517). However, sites such as *goodreads.com*, created as a forum for readers to discover, track and talk about books, counters some of the authority held by such agencies like the editors of *The-Book-of-the-Month-Club*. Notwithstanding the assumption that *goodreads.com* likely receives much of its income from the advertising and publishing industry, sites such as these allow for readers to feel that they are making more informed choices due to other readers' responses to books, therefore exercising more agency than perhaps the readers in Radway's study. To this end, the manner that Kathleen's book club selects their titles is changing the way that book clubs have been viewed in the past as culture consumers, aligning with Long's (2003) assertion that "reading groups do not simply fit themselves into the field of literary value but rhetorically reshape and sometimes dispute it" (p. 124).

Related to the idea of book clubs as targets for purchasing power, a noteworthy finding that stretched across the data is the importance that participants place on choosing books that are accessible at public libraries. Although some participants claim that members of their club prefer actually owning the books they read, they also spoke of waiting until a new release is distributed in paperback form in order to offset some of the purchasing cost. There is a strong sense that this economic factor is important to the vitality of the club. Kathleen mentioned that members in her club who don't mind buying books will pass them around for others to read. Both Anne and Charlotte mentioned that waiting until a book is in paperback also increases the chance of accessing the book at public libraries in a timely manner. Lydia explains that there are members in her club who are adamantly against such big-boxed book stores like Chapters, others who do

not prefer libraries, and even some are against e-books so having a book that is accessible in a variety of formats is essential to satisfying the values that members' place on the book producing industry.

This revelation deeply resonates with me as I believe choosing a hardcover book was the beginning of the downfall in the second book club to which I belonged. As briefly mentioned, we were a fairly new group, composed of five friends who decided to formalize our very frequent and enjoyable discussions about the books we read. At our third book club meeting, one member suggested John's Irving's (2012) *In One Person* as the next month's pick. She read the following passage from John Irving's website:

In One Person is about a young bisexual man who falls in love with an older transgender woman—Miss Frost, the librarian in a Vermont public library. The bi guy is the main character, but two transgender women are the heroes of this novel—in the sense that these two characters are the ones my bisexual narrator, Billy Abbott, most looks up to.



Billy is not me. He comes from my imagining what I *might* have been like if I'd acted on all my earliest impulses as a young teenager. Most of us don't ever act on our earliest sexual imaginings. In fact, most of us would rather forget them—not me. I think our sympathy for others comes, in part, from our ability to remember our feelings—to be

honest about what we *felt like* doing. Certainly, sexual tolerance comes from being honest with ourselves about what we have *imagined* sexually. (n.d.)

It was a unanimous decision. We were literally frothing at the mouth at the thought of indulging in this titillating tale only to find a month-long waiting list at local libraries and few members interested in buying the book. I happily purchased the book while also cognizant that it would take me at least one month to read it. Once finished, I offered it to remaining members but momentum to both access and read the book had started to fade. Dates for the subsequent meeting were postponed numerous times, and the book club eventually disbanded. Admittedly, I was mildly heartbroken as not only was this book club my idea, I was frustrated that members seemed to take a very nonchalant attitude towards reading the book and more importantly, I was anxious to talk about it because it was such a riveting read. One member did read the book and over tea on one sunny afternoon, I was able to partially fulfill my insatiable craving to talk about what was created and lived through (Rosenblatt, 1978,1982) during the reading event. This experience brought forth insight into such practices as choosing books readily accessible, that I may not have realized are so critical to the book club's very existence.

Book Selection Processes

"Books make great gifts because they have whole worlds inside of them."

(Neil Gaiman, author of *The Day I Swapped my Dad for Two Goldfish*)

As previously mentioned, I found an interesting range in how participants describe their respective clubs book selection processes yet one common emphasis was the agreed goal to read quality literature. A few of the participants proudly speak of an informal, casual format, often in comparison to "other kinds of book clubs" or "the typical book club way," exemplified by Isabella who said "we didn't sit down I think like some book clubs do and plan the year. We would agree at the end of each one which ones we would do next and it was sort of who's ever turn it was" (I, 14/02/13). This sentiment is reflected by Maria and Sophia who also voiced their appreciation for the lack of structure and rigorous organization of book selection processes that they perceive other clubs seem to have.

Moving slightly towards a more organized selection process, Lydia's club similarly decides the next month's title at the end of the current month's meeting. As previously mentioned, this club has a website, designed by the founder but all members have equal writing access. The site lists all of the books the club has read to date including reviews and ratings by members and acts in some ways as an extension of the book club. Due to the large number of members (capped at 18), Lydia has only had one opportunity to suggest books in the two years she's belonged to the club. However, she assures me that it will be her turn within the next couple of months. She elaborates on this experience,

When I picked, I had two books: one of them was *The Book of Negroes* and the other one was *House Rules* ...So *House Rules* is written from five different perspectives of people and it was about a boy with autism and his struggles as he's pinned for murder... And I

thought it was really interesting. And then there was *The Book of Negroes*, which is a super classic and some of us had already read it but I hadn't and it was on my list of books to read, so we voted. There was a hater of the author [Jodi Picoult]...so she kind of poisoned it all [I laugh]. Yeah, it was kind of funny. But at the same time, the *Book of Negroes* is such an awesome book and it was in the top three best books that we've read in the book club and everybody fell in love with it and it actually kind of snowballed that we were reading similar, trending books, month after month. (I, 03/03/13)

This passage offers great insight into book selections processes. Firstly, the veto power that members have speaks to the importance of both individual tastes and collective consensus. Lydia's description of one member "poisoning" or swaying the vote on one of her two titles, sheds light on the emphasis that his club places on individual divergent tastes over collective agreement. Members seem to appreciate others' perspectives on books, but at the same time, voice their opinions about certain books or authors when these opinions are strong and personal. Secondly, Lydia seems to have reconciled the veto of one of her picks, in part because she not only enjoyed *The Book of Negroes* but she also speaks proudly of the fact that the book was amongst the club's favourites. I wonder if the book was not as highly regarded by the club, would Lydia have felt as legitimated. In retrospect, I wish I would have probed into such processes which may create tensions from which clubs typically steer away.

Anne and Charlotte who also admit that their club has a fairly relaxed selection process both describe a situation that inherently shaped their clubs reading identity. One member in their club suggested the critically acclaimed book *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza's Doctor's Journey* (Abuelaish, 2011) to which another member said the content is too emotional for her as a mother (the author's daughters were killed in political turmoil). Anne also adds that she prefers not to

read anything scary and admits that the club takes individual preferences into consideration when trying to find titles that are appealing to everyone. Rose relates and comically shares that her book club has had an impact on the way she classifies books suitable for the club.

They're different women: they are from different backgrounds and they have different interests. So I think when I read, I do think about that or when I read a book list or I go to Chapters and look around for books, sometimes I do think that 'I wonder if book club would like to this?' For example, one of the members is quite religious, so anything to do with like homosexuality is really hard for her so part of me wants to throw it into her face and say 'read this!'. Like I brought *Sex* to the book club one time which was Madonna's book that she did about 12 years ago, that big silver one? [I nod]. She was horrified [laugh] and it was actually embarrassing because this is when I was quite new to the club so it was actually quite embarrassing for me but I just carried on and I just opened it up but that was sort of the person I was at the time and now I'm a little more sensitive, you know? Like, she doesn't feel comfortable with it so why would I throw it in her face? So...I'm more aware that now when I'm picking books [to suggest to the club]. (I, 26/03/13)

I must admit, I had quite a visceral reaction to this story and shared a bout of laughter with Rose for minutes afterward. I applaud Rose for suggesting such a risky text to a group of women she admitted to feeling unfamiliar with at time, as the only member who was a working mother and who lived outside of the neighbourhood. Although Rose has a diverse taste in literature, she is more aware of her divergent tastes and now suggests books that align more with the tastes of the group, reaffirming the importance of the collective identity. She jokingly concludes that her book

club will most definitely not be discussing *Fifty Shades of Grey* (James, 2011), which she has read and detested.

Diana, Grace, James and Emma describe similar book selection processes occurring at the start of the year (typically June or September) where each member presents a few books of their choice and the voting or winnowing begins. In both James' and Emma's club, the process begins in September, where a discussion would ensue over which titles to read based on book reviews that members have found, what people have already read and want to read, generating a list of what to read over the course of the year. Logistics of hosting the meeting also come into play as members choose their month and book to host, typically divided equally among everyone. This process sounds typical of book club practices and the explanation did not take up much time during either interview. Conversely, Diana describes a very detailed, laborious book selection process where one member (appropriately nicknamed Madame Secretary) compiles a list of everyone's choices for members to view before the meeting.

On the assumption that we've done our homework and we kind of skimmed through it and we kind of have an idea about what we would vote for, then it's a really ridiculous long and arduous voting process but there's lots of time and wine and lots of laughs, and then there's always someone who feels a little bit heartbroken and says "Neither of my books are being chosen!" [laugh]. It's really fun but it is a flawed process. So what we'll do is we'll go through all 20 and put up our hands and say which ones we are interested in and we'll keep doing this until we eliminate a book. But we still have to get it down to one book per month so it's about nine in total....And we vote and we will whittle it down, and whittle it down. It's a long process but it always gets reduced to laughter over how ridiculous this process is. And it is really working [laughs]? (I, 13/11/12)

Although Grace can relate as she admits that her club's selection procedure has evolved into a process more akin to James' or Emma's club, the initial system was similar to what Diana describes. In the early days, members would bring a number of chosen books and the books which received the most votes were selected but sometimes "somebody would be getting five of their books and then someone wouldn't get any of the ones that they wanted because of popularity, so it shifted over a few years ago and after a couple of different morphings... we got to the point where we are now" (Grace, I, 05/02/13). The need for the selection process to remain democratic evidently shines through these descriptions of book selections practices and protocols, echoing Long's (2003) assertion that clubs strive for an egalitarian ethos.

Parallel to the importance of the book selection process are the divergent views on finishing the book prior to the meeting. As much as participants emphasized the undeniable social aspect of book clubs, talking about the book was more essential for some than others. A common sentiment expressed by participants was that at times, the meetings are more social than grounded by the book. This partly depended on the members' responses to the book. The idea of attending the meeting without having read (or finished the book) brought forth varying reactions. For some, like Isabella, this was not a favourable practice.

Sometimes a couple of people would show up having not read the book which I found very interesting and they still wanted to be there and they just sort of sat and listened and on those times, the discussion on the book was less and that was a bit of a drag actually [laughs]. (I, 14/02/13)

Likewise, in the six years that his book club was in operation, James said there was only one book that he didn't read and in turn, refrained from attending the meeting: "I mean if I hadn't read the book, I don't know why I would go" (I, 23/03/13). While Emma admits that she

feels a bit lost at meetings when she hasn't read the book but is usually glad she attended: "It's a bit of a treat to get out sometimes and talk to adults...and there have been times when I'm like I'm overwhelmed and I cannot read the book but...nobody's judging. They don't say 'you didn't read the book, again!'" (I, 07/01/13). Many participants agree and claim that their clubs welcome members to attend the meetings without having read the book in its entirety. Among the comments were those made by Diana, relaying a cautionary remark made by a member at one her club's meetings, "Don't even think about *not* coming if you haven't finished the book! (I, 13/11/12). This sentiment was agreed upon by Anne, Charlotte, Lydia, Grace, Emma and Kathleen, all of whom spoke, some at great lengths, about how the book club afforded its members the leniency if they could not finish the book.

It's not like super scrutinizing you know if you don't read the book then you are not allowed to come. You know, read it if you want to, if you don't like it, don't read it, things like that. It's super laid back and easy going, and you can constantly be participating, regardless if you haven't had time to read the book that month. (Lydia, 03/03/13)

When I first heard of it I was like, I don't think I want to be in a book club, like I didn't really, I don't know what made me decide to do it, because I felt like I'm not a big reader, but then I just decided and it's been totally no pressure...and at the very beginning it was like and you can just come. The very first book, I remember reading that night before people came and a couple people hadn't finished it either so then I thought 'okay well I'm not the only one who didn't finish it' so it kind of gave me permission. (Anne, 29/10/12)

Of course it's evolved over the years. Initially, it was more business as usual and then over the years it's gotten a little more personal. And as I say, we don't really know each other very personally so it's a pretty safe place to talk about your kids, or a problem

you're having with your mom, we're also all going through the same stages of life at the same time like whether it's aging parents or challenging children or personal health you know those kinds of things. (Rose, 26/03/13)

The quotes above speak to Long's earlier claim that members do not attend book meetings to merely report on the book, which would imply an efferent act (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1982) of the reading event. Although reading books is an obvious central feature of book club, participants are not simply articulating an abstraction, categorizing elements, or ordering reactions in their book club meetings, especially as most openly admit that they still attend the meetings even if they have not read the book. While many participants speak of the obvious pleasure they derive from reading, a common articulation was that belonging a book a club is about much more. Another overriding statement was about connections made through the club; connections to each other, to the book and to the worlds they experience through reading their chosen books.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the participants' responses to the appeals to joining and maintaining book club memberships. Although the social aspects, intellectual stimulation and motivation to read more are intertwined and cannot be easily separated, individually these reasons speak to different dimensions that book clubs offer in the lives of members. The various book selections showcase some commonalities among participants' respective book clubs but also, and more importantly, highlight the unique practices and protocols of the clubs, some of which are reshaping the relationships that book clubs have historically had with such literary authorities as commercialized book clubs and editors. Invoking Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, I have shown various examples of how participants approach books with more

aesthetic stances rather than efferent, argued to be a much needed focus in today's pedagogy. I will now turn my focus to both explicit and implicit pedagogical implications from the participants' experiences with book club membership.

READING OUTSIDE OF THE COMFORT ZONE: PEDAGOGICAL LINKS

“I don't believe in the kind of magic in my books. But I do believe something very magical can happen when you read a good book.”

(J.K. Rowling, author of *Harry Potter Series*)

“Books opened up a whole new world to me. Through them I discovered new ideas, traveled to new places, and met new people. Books helped me learn to understand other people and they taught me a lot about myself.”

(Judy Blume, author of *Blubber*)

It is evident that the participants value the book club as a drive to read more, particularly *more* quality literature that they may not have otherwise given a chance. Although participants' voice varying perspectives on the importance of reading or finishing the book prior to the meeting, many admit that they appreciate the affordance that the book club allows if this is not feasible. Notwithstanding this appreciation, participants often said that they would persevere through a book club book more so than they would if reading a book of their choice. Although books to read are chosen collectively as a club with quality literature as a goal, it is apparent that some participants' individual tastes, as in the case of Lydia's 'poisoned' pick and Rose's 'risky' read, conflict with the other members' tastes. To this end, it is likely that at some point, there may be a book chosen that is less than desirable for the members. Reading outside of their comfort zones can be a welcoming experience, depicted by Emma's comment “I love it because I'm reading books that I wouldn't normally pick so that's what I really like about it” (I, 07/01/13); however, reading too far outside the boundaries of comfort zones can be an entirely different experience, echoing earlier negative experience of being forced to read in school. This has been the case for some participants and the reflections on these experiences have significant pedagogical implications.

Approximately half of the participants share examples of less than favorable experience of reading a book they that did not, at least initially, enjoy. For Diana, this book was *Wolf Hall* (Mantel, 2009), “she’s very successful and critically acclaimed author but we hated it! It was horrible. Everything about it and...actually most people didn’t finish it. (I, 13/11/12). For Maria, it was *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven* (Malarkey & Malarkey, 2010), which she could not finish and confesses that spiritual books are not her forte. Although Lydia does not mention a specific title, she explains:

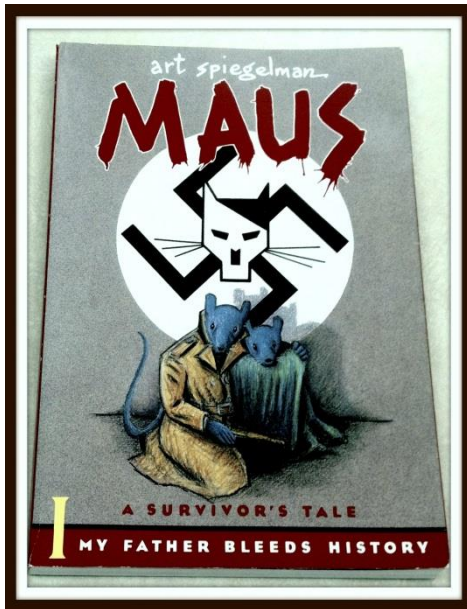
I do take people's points of view into account and kind of structure my own opinion based on that with it. At the same time, I do have my own thoughts and points of view... but it does affect what I read and how I read and my overall opinion of the book. Sometimes I go and I'm thinking ‘OMG. This book is a 2/5. There's no way I'm giving it anything higher’ and then we talk about it and I think ‘wow I didn't think about it that way: 3.5.’ (I, 03/03/13)

Grace admits that at times “it's just not the book you want to spend your time on. They're doing it for yours so you have to do it for theirs and you’re not liking it but you’ve got to finish it.” (I, 05/02/13). It is interesting to note that all four comments also came from participants who earlier emphasized that their club afforded them the leniency of not finishing the book. To this end, there is a strong sense that persevering through a book for club is an important source of pride to the participants, and essential to the club’s vitality.

Classroom Implications

Reading outside of one’s comfort zone while still maintaining the desire to read good quality literature has interesting implications for classroom reading practices. Early on in the interview, Isabella admitted that if she hadn’t read the book, attending the meeting would be of

little interest. When I asked if she remembers any titles that the club read (as it had disbanded years previously), Isabella proudly smiled, placed a copy of the famous graphic novel *Maus: A survivor's tale* (Spiegelman, 1991) on the table and said “the reason that I brought it is because I never would have chosen this book”. She further elaborates on the mixed emotions she felt while reading this book for the club:



So, when somebody wanted to read a graphic novel I thought ‘yuck!’ It was the science teacher from the high school and he said I'd heard all about it and it's great. And so I bought it and took one look at it and went ‘yuck’...but she really wanted to read this and I thought ‘ugh’ and I loved it! But what I really learned is how important choice is because reading a book like this for example [*Maus*], it was almost like homework and...I remember lots of times, I was

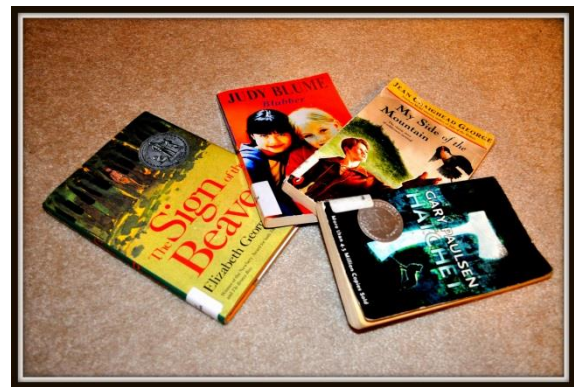
like ‘Ugh, I gotta get this finished’ which is never how I approach reading a book. I remember having lots of discussion about this [book] then [as] my sons were in high school. They read it, they loved it so now, that was one thing that I've come away with thinking I'm glad I joined because...this is the one and only graphic novel I've ever read so at least I can say I did it and I wouldn't have read it otherwise. (I, 14/02/13)

Although candidly admitting that she found reading *Maus* a treacherous endeavor, evident in such descriptors as “yuck” and “ugh”, the benefits of persevering through the book seem to overshadow the difficult reading. Isabella was able to connect with her sons who had also read the book, as graphic novels can be particularly appealing to students’ literacy practices

(Cremin et al., 2009; Knoester, 2009; Murphy, 2013; Yang, 2008). Although Isabella did not elaborate on how other members of the club responded to the book, I can speculate that hearing others' perspectives on the book only added to her reconciled claim that she "loved it." Furthermore, Isabella explicitly states that this experience impacts how she approaches reading and books in her Grade 4 classroom as she relates to the importance of having a variety of options for her students. "I think the more choice they have, the less it's imposed on them and the more they can feel motivated to read (I, 14/02/13)." Isabella explains that she spends the first half of every year reading *The Butterfly Lion* (Morpurgo, 1996) with the class, often by read alouds and shared reading. Reading the same text together is important for Isabella to gauge how the students' progress through the novel. During the second half of the year, she creates a reader's workshop, loosely based on a book club format,

So we talk about picking a book that's a good fit for you and how to do that and they even have some choice in how they can respond to it....And then they start looking at each other's books like 'what are you reading?' So we first start reading and sit in an area out there that we call the pod and we go around in a circle and everyone reads the first sentence in their book and it's magical but they are not like the 'true' literature circles either . I'm thinking of calling it book club instead of lit circles now to build the idea that you're in a club (I, 14/02/13)

Detailing that she uses such books as *Blubber* (Blume, 1974/2006), *The Sign of the Beaver* (Sprear, 1993), *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 2008), *My Side of the Mountain* (George, 1959/2004), Isabella explains that students come together, either with



sections of the text already read, or take turns reading in small groups. She also engages students in paired reading of different texts, where students alternate reading two different texts to each other. Practices such as these are common in progressive literacy strategies such as *The Daily Five*, (Boushey & Moser, 2006) a program created by two teachers aimed at allowing students to take ownership of their reading. This discussion takes into consideration the literature earlier presented on teachers' reading habits. Studies suggest that by reflecting on their reading practices, teachers are better equipped to understand students' potential habits and struggles (Mour, 1977; Mueller, 1973) by promoting practices that reinforce the intrinsic motivation to read (McKool & Gespass, 2009) and having a more informed perspective on children's literature (Cremin, et al., 2009; Trelease, 2006). To this end, developing the habit and capacity of reading within a community of readers in the classroom further allows for the reinforcements that texts can make and reinforce intense personal experiences (Rosenblatt, 1982). Isabella concludes that although she has students answer individual questions about the books to complement their book club discussions, she offers a variety of creative responses for culminating activities which students do as a group such as graffiti walls, dramatic readings of passages and creative journal responses.

Both Diana and Grace spoke at great length about the book clubs they create in their classrooms with the element of choice as a key factor. Within the first few days of the school year, Diana talks to her class about her love for reading and of the value she places in belonging to a book club. "I make it really clear that we share this love of reading and it's not enough to read a book by yourself. We love to get together and talk about it and it doesn't just end with the last page of the book" (I, 13/11/12). Similar to Isabella, she begins the year with the class reading the same book, either *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2001) or *The Westing Game* (Raskin, 1979), using

read alouds and shared reading to gauge various reading stages. Once the book is finished, Diana facilitates a book club discussion in small groups, drawing explicit parallels to how her club's meetings roll out.

And they think the book club meeting is of course like a free class: it's fun, it's unstructured or semi-structured but it's not asking a lot of them. It's easy and it's interesting to hear the others and that also incorporates a lot of 'accountable talk' and respecting others' opinion because some people love the book and some people hate the book and the same thing happens with adults in our book club meeting. (I, 13/11/12)

Diana proceeds by creating what she refers to as "a book club activity" whereby the students have some choice in the text they read. Diana presents five or six books including,

Parvana's Journey (Ellis, 2002), *Mud City* (Ellis, 2003) and *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989) of which students are asked to pick their top three. Then, Diana organizes the groups, bearing in mind varying reading levels. She explains that there is always one book below grade level and those who struggle at reading



tend to choose the book for its cover or length which lessens the role she plays in orchestrating the groups. Over a period of one month, students are expected to come to class with sections read and prescribed by Diana for bi-weekly book club discussions. She admits to posing guiding questions for students as they progress through the book in attempts to keep the conversations flowing as well as assigning mini-individual reflections along the way. Once the groups have finished the book, they have a final, unstructured book club discussion. Diana gently guides

students to “let it go as it rolls out and just a reminder that my book club gives each person a chance: we call it a roundtable to say whether you like the book or didn't and why” (I, 13/11/12).

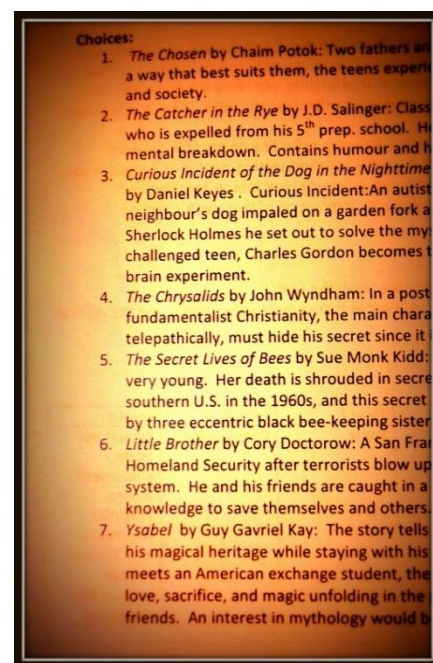
When I asked if she’s ever encountered resistance to using book clubs, Diana responds:

The only area that I would feel vulnerable to criticism would be the length of the text as in a novel as opposed to some short text...I just disagree with that so much that I feel confident in what I'm doing because I definitely do tons of short text stuff. There is a time and a place for it and it is very useful for some things but not to the exclusion of a book...I can tell you that without hesitation every single year I have had one or more parents come to me and say “you have instilled a love of reading, my child had never read a full book before”...Some kids by Grade 6, they have still not read a whole novel. And I’ve been complimented that is was such a great choice, and it hooked their kid and it hooked them into reading. A mother stood in the hallway, crying, telling me this about her son and she hugged me. I mean I've had some amazing feedback about getting them into *books* [emphasis]: not just short texts... I think that is a love of reading. They are not going to go when they're a teenager or in their adult years and seek out one page text, ya know? (I, 13/11/12)

Diana explicitly positions herself against balanced literacy—itsself a convoluted notion—and considered herself a renegade for underscoring the reading of novels rather than short texts often used in guided reading practices. Hibbert and Iannacci’s (2005) comprehensive analysis on the marketization of such packaged balanced literacy programs sheds light on the way many teachers like Diana resist such reductionist approaches. Current pedagogical initiatives like balanced literacy have been criticized for the overemphasizing short (arguably, meaningless) texts, prescribed and fragmented times frames, and limiting teachers active involvement in the

curriculum decision making processes (Hibbert, 2002; Heydon, Hibbert & Iannacci, 2004; Irvine & Larson, 2001; Spiegel, 1998). Furthermore, such packaged pedagogical programs, conceivably spawned by educational reforms, are implemented in a top-down approach with little to no teacher input and claim to offer a one-size-fits all literacy program, which directly opposes the current pedagogical belief in student-driven instructional practices that meet the diverse needs of students. Hibbert and Iannacci stress that is not the literacy strategies themselves—read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, working with words, sustained reading—that are the focus of concern, but rather the manner in which these products are being marketed and in turn, purchased and deposited in the classroom as teacher proof and packaged pedagogy without question. In a bone fide balanced approach to literacy, teachers make informed decisions about their instructional practices through reflection, professional development, and knowledge of their students’ needs. There is a sense of empowerment and confidence in the act of creating curriculum that cannot be achieved by simply copying (McLaughlin & DeVoodg, 2004) or following programs that are inherently disconnected from the classroom needs.

Grace is also a fan in using book club in her Grade 10 and 11 high school English classes. Much like Isabella and Diana, Grace spoke about the importance of students having choice in their reading as well as offering her perspective on the novels she presents to her students. What is interesting about Grace’s story is the lack of resistance to purported literacy programs articulated by both Isabella and Diana. This could be due to the acceptance of reading novels in high school as opposed to the added emphasis on

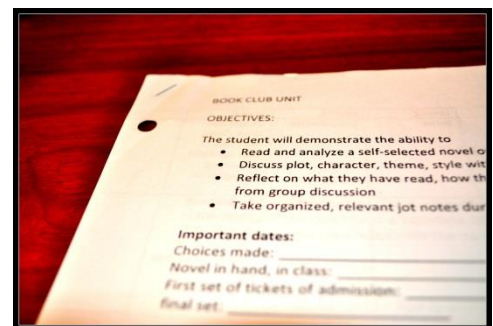


the mechanics or skills based reading more common the in primary/junior curriculum.

Nonetheless, Grace's book club unit is very organized, evidenced by the Grade 10 three page handout (see Appendix L) that she walked me through during our interview. Grace admits that she tries to "scare" her students on the first day of the semester, emphasizing that they must stay on top of their reading to keep up the momentum. Grace displays each choice, detailing her experience in transacting with each book. "I do orally tell them how I felt while I was reading it, what I think would work and what I've seen happen with the books in book club." Students choose their top three books and Grace starts the process of dividing the class into book clubs. As a club, students decide how much to read over subsequent weeks and are expected to arrive to each of the discussion classes (three in total) with their "tickets of admission" in order to participate in the club's discussion, Grace elaborates:

They have to come prepared: they have to have read and not just read, they've had to have reflected. They have to have written something up that will help propel the group through the discussion because they're going to have a full period and for four kids with a book without me telling them what to discuss, they need to come with stuff that's going to make them work...So I call this tickets of admission, and it's chaos [laughs]. (I, 05/02/13)

Tickets of admission include two discussion questions with at least four jot notes, two literary passages that speak to either them in some way or use language that they did not understand, and a paragraph outlining their impression of that week's section. Grace admits she closely monitors these tickets of admission, striking a highlighter through each page (to deter students



from using the same work twice) and has expectations that students will arrive prepared. Those

whose work does not meet the criteria end up in what Grace refers to as “the row of shame” where students work independently in hopes of attaining their tickets of admission. Grace admits that most students arrive to class with their tickets of admission but finds it disheartening in the rare event that more than one or two are cast off to the row of shame.

Over the course of three weeks, the book clubs typically progress “amazingly well”. She assesses the clubs’ discussions for an oral discourse mark, a personal essay on the experience after the unit is complete, and the submission of the weekly tickets of admission.

I think the book club will make them read for depth more than surface, more than speed. I think it's even better than when they read it as a class novel because with the class novel, they're answering three questions for homework so they're looking for the answers to those questions. Where in the book club, they have to come up with their own reflection and questions on their own so it develops their critical thinking a little bit more and accountability, organization, teamwork: all those life skills are worked on as well so I think it's a better way of doing it for sure. (I, 05/02/13)

Through a transactional reading lens, the passage above speaks to the difference between aesthetic and efferent stances on reading, of which Grace appears to be well aware. Students’ reading a book with the goal of looking to answer comprehension questions refers to an efferent stance of reading, where the attention is on what is to be carried away at the end of the reading to arrive at some desired result (Rosenblatt, 1982). Swinging the pendulum along the transactional theory continuum, aesthetic reading by its very nature has an intrinsic purpose. While students’ reading for their book club discussion is still for a purpose, they are reflecting on and questioning what they are reading, “giving form to a sense of what has been lived through in the literacy transaction, giving evidence of what has caught the young reader’s attention; what has stirred

pleasant or unpleasant reactions” (p. 276). While Rosenblatt cautions that teachers’ requests for verbal responses to text can often steer readers towards an efferent stance, the types of questions that Grace poses as tickets of admission are aesthetically grounded, evidenced in the terminology as *reflecting, impression, and literary passages*. Questions such as these “enable young readers to select concrete details or parts of the text that had struck them forcibly” and “foster expressions of response that kept the experimental, qualitative elements in mind” (p. 276). Furthermore, the by-products of an aesthetic reading stance are likely educational, informative with social and moral values which responding to literature is often praised. Grace wholeheartedly agrees:

And then they do this essay at the end...where they talk about how they grew socially and academically and personally so they have to look at these three areas of their life as a section of each and it’s a five paragraph essay so it’s very simple but the stuff that comes out like ‘I met these people that I never would've talked to and now I know them.’ I feel more comfortable in the class and personally I feel like I want to read more literature like Victorian. It’s literature that I've never read before and academically, now I know this term, this term, and this term’ and it's because they're in [a book club]. (I, 05/02/13)

The narratives created above speak to the good *consumer* practices that Hibbert and Iannacci (2005) argue for, where teachers are actively involved and informed in the process of selecting and modifying materials for their students reading practices. Taking this one step further, I would argue to add an element of good *production* in the practices as teachers are using the knowledge produced and gleaned from their book club membership and informing their instructional decisions. The participants strive to read good, quality literature in their respective book clubs and they in turn, strive to provide valuable literature to their students. This is

evidenced in two ways: first, by their reading engagement with the books they provide as choices to their students; secondly, the literary merit of the books they select as many of the children's and young adult books discussed are recipients of Newbery Medal awards. Through the use of book clubs in class, informed by their book club membership, the participants provide opportunities for students to explore and connect what they read to their experiences, further developing their understandings of the world and ways of being and acting in it (Wells, 1997).

Other participants offer insights and examples of how book club membership affects their teaching practices, although some are not as explicit as using book clubs in class. Charlotte relates her struggles of disconnecting to books to the selection of books that she presents in her classroom. "I don't want to read stuff that I don't connect to, and I find I can get them, if they've



read a few books then it opens up the door and I just have others" (I, 12/10/12). As I mentioned in her participant profile, Charlotte has been trying to expand the stock of books she provides for her students as her school does not have a library. Since arriving in her classroom to find very little and dated book options for students, she has added titles such as *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2010), *Lullabies for Little Criminals* (O'Neill, 2006), *Street Pharm* (van

Diepen, 2006), *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), and *The Twilight Saga* (Meyer, 2005), all of which have been requested by her students, many of whom are reluctant readers.

For me, it's just about having them read....So even though with book club it's only once a month but I'm reading that book, whether it's a book that can help me understand them as people and maybe what they're going through and again, they are different from me...I haven't walked this path. I wasn't an inner city youth. I wasn't someone who experienced

mental health issues. I didn't walk in the footsteps of these kids so it's always trying to draw on understanding their world to sort of better be able to relate. (I, 12/10/12)

Charlotte relates her past struggles of not being able to connect with books to the reading lives of her students in attempt to offer books that would likely to appeal to them.



This is consistent with the earlier discussion of teachers who experienced struggles in reading, can be better equipped to understand and relate to their students potential struggles (Daisey, 2010; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995). Additionally, Charlotte admits that she is from a very different background than her inner-city student population. Charlotte uses the books, many of which have been read for her book club, to gain insight into narratives that potentially align more with the lives of her students than her own. In this way, books “and the personal stories they elicit...becomes a prism for the interrogation of self, other selves and society beyond text” (Long, 2003, p. 153).

Anne can relate and shared a powerful story during our interview of how one eye opening book deeply resonated with her:

...*Lullabies for Little Criminals*, that book stayed with me for so long because at the time I had a student prostituting so that book and the conversation and all that just stayed with me. I just couldn't get her out of my head that whole fall after reading that book. I carried her with me so that really informed my connection with her and on some level my huge commitment. I knew I was never going to be able to save her but I was trying my hardest, to try to get her out of that. So, certain books I think have done that. (I, 29/10/12)

Empathizing with a student who is prostituting herself is an unfathomable, daunting task. For Anne, the reading and subsequent discussion of *Lullabies for Little Criminals* (O'Neill, 2006)

became a way—possibly the only way—for her to connect with this student, epitomizing Helen’s earlier conviction that “reading connects people” (RP, 11/02/13) and many would agree (Clifford, 1991; Leggo, 2011; Long, 2003; Nafisi, 2003; Rosenblatt 1938/1995, 1978, 1982, 1991; Sedo, 2004, 2011; Sumara, 1996, 1997). This book is admittedly one of my personal favourites; it is beautifully written and thought provoking about serious human conditions like heroin addiction, homelessness, and youth prostitution. The heart wrenching story told through the eyes of a 12 year-old narrator, Baby, allows the reader to experience the grim felicity of a world unhinged (Dillard, 1982). There is no happy ending, no saviour of childhood, but Baby both learns and teaches that compassion is not lost in bleak times as she embraces her ability to steal bouts of happiness in the midst of miserable situations. Although I cannot fathom being in Anne’s predicament while reading this book, stories such as these are “integral to interrogating lived and living experiences, and to narrating other possibilities. Literature does not tell us how to live. Literature works to evoke possibilities for living” (Leggo, 2011, p. 38).

Talking to students about books adds another layer to the often precarious student-teacher relationship. Book talk also showcases teachers as readers, thereby enhancing their role as reading models (Cremin et al., 2009) to students. Like the stories above, it is important for Lydia, who is an avid young adult fiction fan herself, to connect with her students about the books she reads.

I’m always enticing them to read. There’s this one kid who “eats” books, basically. She just goes through them like crazy and it would be a bit more difficult with her because she’s in 10th grade and she’s dyslexic but she is a history buff...I’m also reading *The Book Thief* [Marcus Zusack] and I just think the Nazi/Germany plot going on and the perception of death writing the book. I think she would love it so I brought that up to her

and I was like “I think you should read this. Read the cover... I think you would love it”.
So, those kinds of things, that’s how I integrate it [the book club] into my curriculum. (I,
03/03/13)

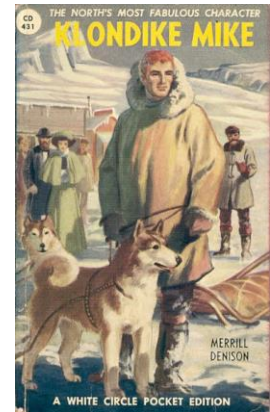
Lydia’s earlier mention of her book club’s online component also opens up sites of possibilities for future classroom practice. Although online books clubs are beyond the scope of this particular research, the popularity of such is growing, particularly with young adults (Scharber, Melrose & Wurl, 2006), which can both encourage reading practices in and outside the classroom while tightening the gap between the personal and school literacies.

Although James confessed that he does not see any link between his book club and his pedagogical approaches, he sees value in talking to his students about the books they are reading. “If I see them reading a book, I’ll ask them questions about it...is that a good book or do you like that author? I’ve had kids ask me questions about what I like to read or what I’m currently reading because I’m interested in that sort of thing” (I, 23/03/13). As an avid reader, James said that he always read above and beyond the monthly book required for book club but what he misses most about the club is the social aspect: “the main appeal is because you want people to know that you read a great book and you want to share that with them (I, 23/03/13).” Talking to his students about the books that he reads and the books they read is the essence of what James misses most about his club. That is, connecting to people through books that they read. Although talking about books with his students does not replace book club membership, I am suggesting that belonging to a club and enjoying seven years of collectively reading and talking about books has crept into his pedagogical approaches, regardless if he is conscious of this link. Daniels would (2002) agree: “whenever we run into problems of translating book clubs into the school world, our own grown-up book club experience serves as our management touchstones” (p. 3).

This sentiment resonates with the earlier discussion of Strong-Wilson (2006) notion of literary touchstones, reaffirming how teachers' reading practices are inextricably linked to their pedagogical practices. To this end, James connecting with his students about reading can be seen as a sparks plug, igniting reading enjoyment that many purport in necessary to instill a love of reading in today's youth (Aldana & Wilkes, 2003; Atwell, 2007; Flood & Lapp, 2009; Parsons, 2007; Ponder & Doheny, 2007; Powell-Brown, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978, 1982, 1991; Sumara, 1996; Sumara & Davis, 1998).

Helen adds some insight into how she weaves in the historical fiction that she likes to read into her high school history classrooms. She sees stories as pivotal to how she entices her students to engage with history.

For example, there are certain authors that are really good writers for that kind of storytelling, like Pierre Berton, who has passed away but his book on the Klondike [*Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896-1899*] is fabulous and there are tons of stories. He was such a wonderful storyteller and so I just gobble up that kind of stuff so you know I can take that story and tell them about the guy [Klondike Mike] who tried to move a piano up the path, the



Taken from
http://www.wollamshram.ca/White_Circle/DenisonM.

Chilkoot Pass and how they did that. So those stories are wonderful. (I, 13/01/13)

Keeping students connected to history is an ongoing struggle for many teachers. Studies have shown that students' lack of engagement with history is largely due to the way it is often perceived as facts to be memorized, having little connection to students' current lives (Kohlmeier, 2005; Seixas, 2011). Levstick and Barton (2001) believe that explaining the past through narratives allows for history to be seen as interpretive and meaningful, both critical to

students understanding of past and present experiences. “Student do not discover the past so much as they create it; they choose the event and people that they think constitute the past, and they decide what is important of them to know” (Howell & Prevenier, 2001, p. 1). As previously mentioned in Helen’s profile, in order for students to understand and engage with history, they have to be able to connect to the story. Although Helen does not often read books in their entirety with her class due to “time constraints as there is a lot of material to cover”, she does incorporate excerpts or suggestions for students to read, many of which she’s read for her book club. This could provide opportunities for the enjoyment of reading and curriculum to co-exist (Daisey, 2010).

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, participants’ articulations show how they perceive their experiences in their respective book clubs to affect their approaches to reading. All participants adamantly proclaim to enjoy reading ‘quality’ books chosen by their respective clubs, some of which are outside of their reading comfort zones. While stretching their literary repertoire is an earlier voiced appeal to book club practice, persevering through a book that is less than favourable carries significant implications to the classroom. Participants exemplify the importance of providing informed choices of reading materials to students due to their reflections of reading particular book for their clubs. The three cases of facilitating book clubs in the classroom allows for students to not only transact with the books they chose, but also authentically engage with student-led discussions on how they feel about what they read within a community of readers. Further, engaging in book talk with students about reading, building in-class libraries which can entice students to read other books in similar genres, and talking about

their experiences in book clubs also showcase how participants' book club practices continually enter into the classroom.

TEACHING IDENTITIES AND SUBJECTIVITIES: WEARING DIFFERENT HATS

“Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here.”

(Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*)

Teaching identities have been the subject of many scholars “in light of the knowledge that self-identity and perception shape the ways in which we teach and ultimately how students learn” (Kooy, 2006, p. 201). Identity and subjectivity are often used interchangeably and unpacking the etymology of these words sheds light on their differences. Originating from Latin *idem*, meaning repeatedly, again or the same, identity is most associated with a fixed, stable, and ascribed characteristic of an individual or a collective of individuals.¹² Subjectivity, on the other hand, derives from the French *subjective* implying internal thoughts belonging to a social subject and existing only as perceived.¹³ These notions are most commonly associated with Foucault’s (1977) rejection of the unified self: he posits that the self is challenged and fragmented; a continual work in progress. Thinking of the construction of teacher identity only in the context of a fixed term is obviously problematic, as the underlying assumption is that all teachers are assumed to “possess a consistent identity that serves as a repository of particular experiences in the classroom and schools, the site of thoughts, attitudes, emotions, beliefs and values” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 107). Subjectivity, a concept that allows for the negotiation and reconceptualizing of the self, challenges the rigid notion of identity which is perceived to be something fixed, timeless and rigid. To complicate things further, the use of teacher identity in the literature is used both as fixed, bounded and ascribed as well as “fluid, dynamic, emergent, *in*

¹² According to *Collins English Dictionary- Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition* , Retrieved June 21, 2011, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/identity>

¹³ According to *Collins English Dictionary- Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition* , Retrieved June 21, 2011, from Dictionar.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/subjectivity>

situ and also consequentially interconnected with the context of the curricular conversations in the domains of literacy” (Hall, et al., 2010, p. 235, emphasis in original). Pushing back against the fixed notions of identity, Sumara and Davis (1998) posit that it is “not something that is “contained” within the boundaries of one’s skin but, instead, occurs more ambiguously and tentatively amid the interstices of various interacting and overlapping phenomena” (p. 28). For the purpose of discussing these two different references to identity in relation to teaching, I refer to the notion of teacher identity as the former fixed, consistent, stable and unified construction discussed by Zembylas (2003) and subjectivity as sense of self and ways of understanding the world as described by Weedon (1987). This is noteworthy to distinguish because it is precisely how participants negotiate their teaching identities and subjectivities in book club that is of particular interest here.

Although most participants belong to book clubs composed of members with different career backgrounds, many are teachers, and some are even composed exclusively of teachers. When asked how teaching and school life enter into the book club conversation, for some, there was a strong sense of resistance against engaging in “teacher talk”. This sentiment is best reflected by Isabella who said “I think we just really wanted to take that hat off and leave it at the door” (I, 14/02/13). Sophia strongly agrees, adding insight into resistance that she feels her club has against structure:

I think we are so structured, a lot of us because we are teachers already, that we don't want that same structure when it comes to the book club....for a lot of women, you're outside of those defined roles so maybe when you're there, you can play more with that whole thing because it's not like someone is saying ‘now you're the teacher, now you're

the mother, now you're the wife, or the whatever' so you can let some of that go. (I,
08/04/13)

Long's (2003) assertion that book clubs were traditionally a way for women to escape their defined roles echoes both Sophia's and Isabella's notions of playing with roles and taking off hats. To this end, the book club is positioned as a space for some participants to negotiate their subjectivities, pushing back against the dominant views on unified, fixed teaching identity. Contributing to this discussion, Helen adds that connecting with her colleagues through book club is very important yet finds this increasingly difficult in today's school climate.

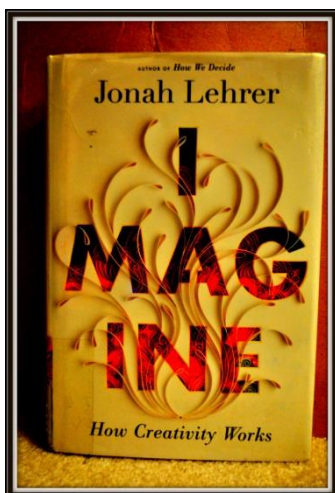
It's an organized kind of profession but I've be teaching for a while and more and more, the amount of free time that we have, and I don't mean free as in you have nothing to do but 'unstructured' shall we say time that we actually have to do the job or to get together with our colleagues is very, very limited...but it really builds relationships and I think it impacts on the culture of schools. So although we go through all of these formalized PD sessions and formalized training camps and you name it to do all the right things to make the school work, sometimes we forget that nothing, like empty space can be effective as organized space or time. I don't think anyone sits around and says "Oh, let's go build our school culture'. I wouldn't say that by any means but I can certainly see that if you get together with people, when you go back to work, you have a better understanding of where they're coming from and you're more apt to work as a more cohesive unit. (I,
13/01/13)

Using books as "launching pads" (Long, 2003) to "form alliances between their own experiences and those of the characters they read" (Sumara, 1998, p. 206), creates new meanings and builds relationships with members, many of whom are fellow teachers, which an important part of

negotiating aspects of the participants' teaching subjectivities. Sharing knowledges, individual subjectivities and collective identities in the form of book clubs, continually shape one another (Sumara, 1996). Exemplified in Helen's comment above, she feels there is no other forum to build relationships with her colleagues. Sophia agrees that her club often discusses education in the bigger sense of the word, resisting school-based initiatives.

I think it's mostly the big ideas. I think it's a way to talk about things that interest us that we don't really feel the forum is anywhere else. A lot of education becomes a process of talking about pedagogy and all the stuff that they're trying to hammer into our heads we knew about 10 years ago and you kind of wonder why people are just now talking about this and figuring it out... They'd rather bring in somebody that they think is a real expert and blabber at us quite frankly [laugh] even though they know that that is poor pedagogy. Every staff meeting they'll start with 'we know that this is not the way to teach but we've only got this much time so this is what we're going to do to you but don't do this to your students!' (I, 08/04/13)

A large portion of Sophia's interview revolved around the interesting concepts that she was learning about through her club's latest pick, *Imagine: How Creativity Works* (Lehrer, 2012),



that she could not wait to talk about later that night at the book club's meeting. Her excitement shone through the entire interview and she parlayed the science of creativity, how companies like *Apple* and *Pixar* organize their buildings to enhance cross-pollination of ideas thereby enhancing creativity, which she juxtaposed against the physical structure of schools. In this sense, the club acts as a learning space and a way to challenge

assumptions about teaching and schooling. Sophia's idea club acts as space where knowledge is created and experienced by a community capable of recognizing the value (Fuller, 2004).

While some participants admit to resisting "going down that road" and talking about their teaching lives in book club discussions, there was also a very palpable need for some to reflect on what happens in the classroom, exemplified in Anne's comment below:

I've also used the club after crazy days, it's been a chance for me to vent a little bit, like as a support group. And sometimes realizing too that there are people in the public sector or private [in the club], you know when you get in your own world sometimes I forget the magnitude of this job and sometimes when I'm saying something I realize 'wow this is a bit crazy at times' so it allows me to have that reflection on what my teaching is about....and hav[e] a different perspective on the world that is outside of teaching. (I, 29/10/12)

For Anne, the club acts a space to negotiate some of the intense situations that can happen in the classroom as she appreciates the perspectives of those who are not necessarily privy to the teaching profession. Rose agrees and although she admits that she does not see her book club members outside the club and reading the chosen book is of the utmost importance to her, "of course you talk about things in your daily life, especially if there are things that are pressing like you know you had a really lousy day something has happened and you need to talk about it" (I, 26/03/13). In this way, book clubs provide important sites for the narration of their ever-evolving teaching subjectivities (Sumara, 1998).

The articulations presented showcase that the club acts as a space for participants to negotiate aspects of their teaching subjectivities and, at times, these discussions can be seen as pushing back against the rigidity of the kinds of discussion that teachers are expected to engage

in within the school walls. Rosenblatt (1978) aptly states that transacting with books “is an important kind of transaction with the environment precisely because it permits such self-aware acts of consciousness” (p. 173). In an era where standardized tests prevail and accountability issues of student achievement are at the forefront of many education policy and reform, book clubs can create spaces for participants to “tell their stories; explore their thinking and relate events that cannot be revealed, perhaps to their department heads...within a community of readers” (Kooy, 2003. p. 142). Sumara (1998) would agree: “acts of reading ought to be considered an important site for the contestations and negotiation of already slippery and shifting identities” (p. 206). All of these instances discussed above showcase how book clubs can act as spaces where reading can invoke the kinds of negotiated discussions that Kooy (2003), Sumara (1996, 1998) and Rosenblatt (1978) argue are necessary in lives of teachers.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have shown how books clubs can act as potential spaces where participants have resisted against the rigidly presumed teaching identity by negotiating aspects of their subjectivities. Viewed against the backdrop of recent literature, teachers arguably need time and space to reflect on their reading and teaching lives. For some, a book club offers space to articulate connections made during the lived through reading event to the daily demands of teaching. For others, connecting to their colleagues is necessitated and afforded at book club meetings; a forum that is absent within the confines of their schools. In a different capacity, having a space to leave the teacher hat at the door and embody a different role is provided by the book club and appreciated by participants.

CONCLUSION

“Although I could not have articulated what I experienced at the time, I now realize that *The Yearling* made me understand what fiction could accomplish and what a writer could do with words.”

(Lois Lowry, author of *Number the Stars*)

This thesis is about teachers’ experiences of reading in book clubs and how these experiences affect their pedagogical practices. My rationale for beginning this study was based on my precarious path to book club membership, involving two failed attempts before finding my place in the current club to which I belong. My journey has provided insight into the delicacies and complexities of the seemingly simply gathering of readers who enjoy talking about books and pondering life. I was able to deeply connect my experience of book club membership to many of the stories the participants shared. I, too, look forward to sharing my reading insights and aim to have the book finished before the monthly meeting. I savour the ebbs and flows of the discussion, listen with piqued interest on how my fellow readers experienced the book, and respond with my perceptions. I overflow with excitement when we decide on the next month’s pick and dash to the nearest bookstore or library to secure a copy. While our book club continually evolves and reshapes with new members joining and others departing, I enjoy the fluidity of the social dynamic and I am proud to be an active and dedicated member. Although not without its challenges, I value my book club for the new insights I gain, the connections I make, and meanings that we create and cherish. Coupled with my previous master’s thesis work, I embarked on this journey to question how teachers perceive their book club experience to affect their pedagogical practices because reading matters to me.



Guided by social constructivism, Rosenblatt's (1938/1995, 1978, 1982, 1991) contributions to reader-response theory, and narrative inquiry, this multimethod, qualitative research seeks to answer four prominent questions. First, I asked why teachers come together every month to read collectively within a community of readers. Second, in what ways do teachers use book clubs to negotiate meaning and create knowledge? Third, how do experiences of book club membership influence teachers' classroom pedagogy? Finally, in what ways do teachers negotiate aspects of their teaching identities and subjectivities in book club discussions? In order to answer these questions, I attempt to tease through the web of intertwining influences that have enhanced my understandings of teachers' experiences in book clubs. Although these questions cannot be neatly separated, I address each answer and offer conclusions to what I have learned throughout this journey.

Social Connections, Intellectual Stimulation and Reading Motivation

The teachers who participated in this study are committed readers and dedicated book club members. They approach books with excitement and determination which has led them to seek out others who share their passion for reading. Time is carved out every month to meet with a trusted community of readers and share reading responses. Reading, both individually and collectively, is not only enjoyable but essential to their personal and professional lives. That said, the reading event does not end with the turn of the last page; it continues by engaging in dialogue with others. Book club membership is valued and cherished, permitting these participants to connect with others, to reap knowledges created by transacting with books as well as to motivate them to continue their beloved practice, opening up new and exciting possibilities for understandings about literature and life. Teachers are central to the development of curriculum and pedagogy yet their lived experiences can be silenced by the dominant voice of test scores

and statistics, exemplifying Clandinin and Connolly's (2000) contentions that "those involved in the phenomenon under study are often missing or silenced" (p. 123). Heydon and Iannacci (2004) agree and contend the need for "methodologies and conceptual frameworks that embed a diversity of perspective...and reflexive research...to ask what form of literacy, literacy practices and literacy pedagogies we privilege in our work" (p. 4). It is my hope that this research stretches understandings of teachers' individual and collective reading practices by valuing the knowledges that can be created in the space of a book club.

Book club membership is an important social and cultural activity for the teachers in this study. Participants speak of the powerful social connections that they form and cherish in their respective book clubs, many of whom have been dedicated members for a number of years. The varying formats I have both described and witnessed speak to Long's (2003) assertion that book clubs allow for the multiplicity of voices which "challenge individual members' preheld notions and allow them the possibility of new epiphanies about both literature and life" (p. 147). Participants hold intrinsic value in reading which they see as an active and social process. The clubs allow for participants to negotiate understandings of self, others, and the world around them as they transact with books and each other, creating new ideas through the stories they share. Further, book club membership provides a space for teachers to reflect on what reading means to them as they enter into each text with their past reading experiences lingering close by. As this thesis is concerned with the links between teachers' individual and collective reading practices and pedagogical implications, the more opportunities teachers have to reflect on their conceptions of literacy and experiences with reading, the better prepared they will be to meet the literacy needs of their students (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Cremin, et al., 2009; Daisey,

1996, 2010; Manna & Misheff, 1987; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1993, 1995; Mueller, 1973).

Meaning Making: Knowledge Creation and Validation

Despite the inherent social aspect of book clubs as a main appeal to both join and sustain membership, there is also a sense of pride in reading the chosen book for the club. While many appreciate the leniency their clubs advocate towards finishing the books, participants equally appreciate the perseverance to read purported 'good' literature often outside of their comfort zones. Many speak with a great sense of pride and fulfillment derived from the books they read for their clubs that they would not have necessarily chosen by their own accord. Participants attribute the motivation to read outside of their comfort zones to the collective nature of book club selection processes. Reading 'quality' literature adds to their literary repertoire, expanding their horizons, and allowing them to assert their intellect and literariness. In some cases, clubs continue to look to the literary authority of award winning books and editors picks. In other cases, book clubs are selecting and giving their credence to the quality of books they choose and reshaping the cultural hierarchy that traditionally dictates what is worth reading.

The knowledge that is created and gained by reading good books for the club is experienced and valued by a community capable of such recognition. Sharing reader-responses with members and negotiating varying perspectives experienced while transacting with books allows for the grappling of difference and tension, embracing other possibilities, and creating new ideas which are pivotal to how the participants in this study experience reading and, in turn, approach pedagogical practices. Further, discussions ensued during meetings often link to their daily lives as participants use the affiliations made amongst members to reflect and make life a little more meaningful. To this end, participants articulate their tacit and experiential knowledge

in book clubs in such a way that they are not able to do outside of this community. These knowledges are validated within the club, adding new dimensions to how participants approach books, learning, teaching, and life. Participants are acutely aware that they can learn, gain and share knowledge within their club while simultaneously enjoying the process and this combination is critical to their dedicated and sustained membership.

While participants enjoy the learning opportunities that their respective book clubs afford, there is a palpable resistance to have the club bear any resemblance to school. While participants search for learning, formal education is not what they want. Understandings of tensions between in-school and out-of-school literacies gleaned from the early recollections of reading linger into these protected book club spaces. I began my analysis by unpacking the participants' memories of reading as a way of understanding their experiences which inform their current reading practices. Early recollections of reading, as part of the storied experience that helps make sense of reading identities, form the starting point of attitudes which inform how teachers approach and practice reading in the classroom (Clark & Medina, 2000; Daisey, 1996, 2010; Morawski, 2008; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995; Strong-Wilson, 2006). These storied experiences constitute the ways that the participants construct knowledge and meaning through reflection. Many participants recalled affectionate memories of reading—the way that books ignited their imagination of different worlds and possibilities—entertaining aesthetic stances towards reading. These memories showcase the formative experiences of reading that are brought forth to future reading events (Rosenblatt, 1978). Fond recollections are juxtaposed against the intense memories of struggling with reading, cultivated from their experiences with schooling and the narrow perceptions of what reading entails. Often driven by assessment-product pressures to adhere to classroom demands, emphasis was placed on summarizing,

memorizing and searching for answers. This type of reading is done with more of an efferent stance and one that Rosenblatt (1978, 1982, 1991) argues is overemphasized in schools. More than half of the participants describe these struggles at some point in their journey of becoming readers. Considering the burgeoning literature on the rising tensions between personal and school literacies, these recollections can be seen as the starting point for the conversation of how teachers' reading practices influence classroom pedagogy. Further, these memories also speak to the need for more work to be done in terms of unpacking teachers' recollections of reading and current reading practices if there is any hope to bridge the highly publicized gap between school and personal literacies (Alim, 2011; Alvermann, et al., 1996; Aldana, 2008; Cox & Hopkins, 2006; Cremin, et al., 2009; Faulkner, 2005; Freebody & Freiberg, 2001; Gee, 1999; Hall, 2009; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Kooy, 2003, 2006; Knoester, 2009; Manna & Misheff, 1987; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978, 1982; Sumara, 1996; Townsend, 1998).

Revisiting the assertion by Greenleaf and colleagues (2002) that teachers are products and active agents of the worlds they came from, teachers' early memories of reading form a fundamental layer in how they approach reading, both personally and pedagogically. The participants' memories oscillated along the aesthetic-efferent continuum as they read books and grappled with who they are and their place in the world. A range of experiences were unpacked, some detailing playful associations, being read to and inspired by adults, connecting to their surroundings, and discovering that stories make intense and powerful personal experiences possible. Here, participants were learning to read the world and the word (Friere & Macado, 1987) as they reaped the benefits of transacting with books. Others were filled with unpleasant struggles with reading, being forced to read in school, faking it in school, all of which are conceptualized as looking for something rather than allowing it to happen. With Rosenblatt's

(1978) assertion that the by-products of aesthetic reading stances are always educational and informative, as well as Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) reminder that context makes all the difference, it is evident that teachers must not only be aware of the efferent-aesthetic continuum but embrace the interrelation of both aesthetic stance and efferent stance within the classroom.

Intertwining these memories with the literature on teachers' reading practices, teachers who adopt an aesthetic stance towards reading have been found to use practices that are conducive to reading enjoyment such as sharing personal insight from their reading experiences, discussing books read both in and outside of the classroom, and allotting time for read alouds and independent reading in the classroom (Alvermann, et al., 1996; Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Daniels, 2002; Hadijioannou, 2007; McMahon & Raphael, 1997; Ruddell, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1982; Schwartz, 1996). Practices such as these have been found to work towards narrowing or reconceptualizing the gap between personal and school literacies. On the other hand, the aforementioned research suggests that teachers who approach reading with a mainly efferent stance may perpetuate reading practices in the classroom that conform to their beliefs about reading, manifested in such practices that focus more about comprehension than meaning. At the same time, other studies show that teachers who struggled with reading are more equipped to relate to their students' reading struggles (Daisey, 2010; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995). Remembering their frustrations of reading within the rigid and narrow confines of school can better allow teachers to understand and empathize with their students' resistance to reading and help create conditions that support meaningful and engaging reading practices. Through the participants' articulations of their memories of reading, personal and collective reading practices, and how they approach reading in the classroom, it is evident that they not only understand the

aesthetic-reading continuum but they all work towards reconceptualizing the aforementioned gap between in-school and out-of-school literacies.

Pedagogical Implications

While the motivation to read is a notable appeal to book club membership, many admit to the treachery of reading books with which they struggle to connect. This was evident throughout the participants' articulated reading experiences, ranging from early recollections to recent books chosen by their current book clubs. Although participants enjoy the motivation to read that book clubs provide, they candidly describe the hardship of reading a book that is less than favourable and hence, understand their students' potential reluctance (Alvermann, 2001; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995; Daisey, 1996, 2010). At the same time, there is a sense of pride in finishing the chosen book. The various book selection processes highlight both the commonalities and the unique practices and protocols of book clubs, in which collective identity and divergent tastes can sometimes clash. That said, these practices augment understandings of book club culture, not only by reshaping the relationships that book clubs have historically had with various literary authorities, but highlighting how book club membership can influence pedagogical practice. By reflecting on both the triumphs and struggles in reading books collectively, participants understand the critical dynamics to support these practices in their classrooms.

Findings from this study showcase that there are both explicit and implicit ways that book club practice enters into teachers' instructional practices. Both past and current reading practices, and the experiences of reading in a book club, highlight how important the element of choice is for the participants and in turn, for their students reading practices. One of the most articulated explicit examples of classroom pedagogical links was the significance of offering a selection in

reading materials to students. Although many participants start the year with a shared reading of one particular book, allowing students a choice for subsequent books to read in class is an essential approach taken in their classroom, informed by their past and present reading experiences. This was particularly underscored by those teachers who facilitated book club practice in their respective classrooms which allows students to feel empowered by having choice in what they read. Reading in book clubs facilitated in class further encourages students to approach books with a more aesthetic focus while transacting with their peers in student-led discussions about their textual encounters. Through book club practice in the classroom, participants intensely described their perceptions of students' meaning making opportunities created by engaging with books and making connections to their lives. The participants who spoke of such practices did so in very detailed and passionate ways, while simultaneously reflecting on both their individual and collective reading experiences which, in turn, informed this teaching approach. These findings reflect earlier studies of book club practice in the classroom which not only highlight the overwhelming benefits of students' engagement with books across the grades but also the essential facilitator approach necessary for teachers to embody, which is critical for creating an environment conducive to authentic student-led discussion. (Alvermann et al., 1996; Carrison, Ernst-Slavit, 2005; Certo, et al., 2010; Daniels, 2002; Hadijioannou, 2007; Evans, 2002; King, 2001; Kong & Fitch, 2003; McMahon & Raphael, 1997). By reflecting and actively creating their individual and collective reading experiences, these participants have the tools to not only recognize the strengths in book club practice but also to expand the view of what reading, and talking about reading, looks like in a classroom.

If the aesthetic-efferent stance continuum is to be acknowledged, valued and included as part of the fabric which informs instructional practices, this approach should extend beyond Language or English classrooms. When students find school literacy practices at odds with their motivations to learn, they look for ways to avoid such practices, which create a culture of disengaged or reluctant readers (Alvermann, 2001; Morawski & Brunhuber, 1995). Participants in this study teach a variety of disciplines from outdoor education, to science, art and history. By approaching reading enthusiastically and with the fluid and changing stances that transactional reading allows, teachers of varying disciplines can help to empower students in a variety of reading practices. Examples of cross-curricular reading encouragement in this study could be seen in Helen's use of an excerpt from a book club pick in her history class, Charlotte supplying newspapers for students to read to spark discussions in her civics class, and Lydia's recommendation of *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2005) to a student who has a voracious appetite for historical fiction. Although these are only a few examples, the opportunities to encourage cross-curricular reading are endless. The knowledge gleaned from reflecting on their personal and collective reading experiences helps teachers to better understand their students' literacy needs and practices across the subjects (Darvin, 2006; Levstick & Barton, 2001; Moje, 1996).

Other implicit examples of how individual and collective reading practice enters the classroom were building in-class libraries with a vested attentiveness to students' reading interests, further highlighting the importance of selecting books that pique students' interests as well as engaging students in discussion about what they are reading. Understanding how participants connect to books themselves creates an atmosphere that bolsters such book talk practices in the classroom, further promoting an aesthetic stance towards reading. These explicit and implicit examples of presenting and transacting with literature in fun and engaging ways in

the classroom strongly suggest that book club membership does influence teachers' classroom pedagogy in a variety of ways. Further, these findings caution teachers to develop pedagogies aligning with narrative inquiry and reader-response by continuing to reflect on their reading practices and engage in the kind of reading they hope to support and encourage in and outside of the classroom.

Negotiations of Identity and Subjectivities

Negotiating aspects of teaching identities and subjectivities is also apparent in book club membership, often in complex and contradictory ways. For some, leaving the teacher hat at the door was embraced in order to delve into discussion about books. In this sense, the book club provided a space to resist defined roles, offering liberation through imagination (Flint, 2006). For others, group discussion about the overwhelming nature of the teaching profession helped to gain perspective on the daily classroom demands. Although returning to the text and reflecting on their encounter with it is essential for book club vitality, for some this space also acts as a means through which to connect with colleagues in a creative and thoughtful way, far from the stifling clutches of the school walls. Echoing traditional functions of book clubs (Long, 2003; Seaholm, 1988), discussions that ensue can be seen as subversive acts against the fixed notion of teacher identity. Participants admit that there is no other forum in their lives to engage in the kinds of discussions that book clubs provide which allows for the ongoing negotiation of their subjectivities. By entering into the experience offered by collectively reading together, participants are able to learn about themselves, their world and how they transact within it.

Further Implications

It was Rosenblatt's (1938/1995) hope that "teachers who themselves possess a lively awareness of the world about them will seek to develop the student's sensuous endowment so

that he may gain from life and literature the greatest measure of enjoyment of sound, colour and rhythm” (p. 89). If book clubs are sites for exploring and negotiating identities and subjectivities, which I am suggesting they are, then it is important to foster this activity in schools. A central feature of book club practice is the melding of narratives from books and lived experiences into a collective reflection of life as experienced, desired and imagined by the members. Here, participants are moving beyond reflecting on what they read. As Long (2003) so aptly asserts,

It is not just receptive or reflective but creative in the sense that through such discussion they are imagining and expressing new insights, new definitions both of their own situations in the world and of their own desires or judgements, and new understandings of who they can or want to become. (p. 221)

It is my belief that in order to foster such practices in schools, one area that needs to be further emphasized is the continued narrative inquiry through transacting with books in teacher education programs. Although reflection is an undeniable aspect of teaching, engaging with literature is not often recognized as a part of the professional development of teachers, even though research strongly suggests otherwise (Aldana & Wilkes, 2010; Cremin, et al., 2009; Kooy, 2003, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978, 1982; Strong-Wilson, 2006; Sumara, 1996). Allowing teacher candidates to unpack their past and present reading experiences provides them with better tools to recognize what reading entails and encourage the adoption of the aesthetic stance. This is not to say that the efferent stance towards reading should be ignored but as evidenced in the literature, it is the approach mainly emphasized in schools. Creating space for teacher candidates to engage in the fruitful discussions, which I have shown to ensue in book club practices, encourages the critical thinking needed to inform and support their future students’ reading practices both in and outside of the classroom. It is essential to creating spaces

where teacher candidates inquire into their past and current reading practices and motivations, and face their values and assumptions into what reading entails. Such practices could include writing literacy narratives as way to reflect on early recollections of reading (Clark & Medina, 2000; Daisey, 1996, 2010; Darwin, 2006; McVee, 2004; Morawski & Brunhuber, 2005; Morawski & Gilbert, 2008). Another could be reading and responding to children's (and young adult) books in a book club format to engage with texts that they may be using in future classrooms (Cremin, et al., 2009; Strong-Wilson, 2006). Using a wide variety of texts such as how-to manuals, art, songs, plays, films, memes, etc., and corresponding with a variety of reading responses like graffiti walls, journal entries, art creations, etc. provides ways to spark discussion about what it means to read. The recent increase of teacher education programs in Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.) from one to two years could allow for the necessary time for teacher candidates to work through their conceptions of literacy and reading practices and reflect on how these conceptions inform their teaching. Further incorporating online components of book discussions through course websites or wikis could also create sites of possibilities that encourage both teachers and students alike to stretch their conceptions of reading. These pedagogical practices allow for teachers to best reach students against the backdrop of their narratives and lived experiences which will continue to reconceptualize the gap between in- and out-of-school reading practices.

It is undeniable that further research on teachers' lived experiences is desperately needed. Recent studies on teachers involved in book clubs challenge the traditional transmissive notion of reading, underscoring how meaning is created by the readers themselves. The enormous popularity of book clubs today, and the many alternative forms that continue to evolve, have dismantled the traditional literacy authorities and opened up an arena of continued research.

Research done specifically with teachers involved in book clubs has demonstrated the potential for teachers to share their stories and experiences, and confront the ideologies that construct their teaching practices (Clark & Medina, 2000; Cremin, et al., 2009; Hall, 2009; Kooy, 2003, 2006; Parsons; 2007). Analysis of these spaces allows for a better understanding of what creates the need for such a cultural form and the factors that support it (Long, 2003). Whether the book club is created for teachers to engage with children's literature as a way of seeing themselves as reading teachers (Cremin, et al., 2009), for teacher candidates to confront their ideologies that inform their literacy practices (Clark & Medina, 2000), or teachers' adoption of and resistance to the socially constructed teacher identity (Hall, 2006), there is much to be learned in this provocative space.

Contributions of the Study

This study adds to the growing body of research on teacher narratives, opening doors for extending work on the potential links of personal and collective reading experience to the classroom. Furthermore, this study underlines the value that needs to be placed on readers as they transact with text. The direction for research is a promising one, further disrupting transmissive notions of reading as something to be taught and not practiced. Both acknowledging and working within a transactional theory of reading allows teachers to adopt both aesthetic and efferent stances themselves and in turn, encourage both within the classroom. This research further argues for teacher educators to create spaces for teacher candidates to work through the difficulty and discomfort of reading. While I realize not every teacher enjoys reading as much as the participants in this study (myself included), teachers need to unpack their past, present, and future reading experiences in order to glean the reflections needed to further support the kinds of reading they wish to encourage in their future classrooms. In addition, this study adds to the

burgeoning Canadian research recently done with teachers and reading (Lewkowich, 2013; Radford, 2008; Robertson, 2001, 2007) signaling that reading continues to be an important issue in education.

This research leaves me with hope about the transformative possibilities of book club practices in the lives of teachers and their respective students. One of the most hopeful findings that I feel I have showcased throughout this project is how the participants in this study view reading as a social process; a practice; and, not something that is simply taught. They approach reading, both individually and collectively, by understanding the complexities of transacting with text, oscillating between aesthetic and efferent stances, which not only enriches their lives but enters into their classrooms in a myriad of ways. Maybe these observations could stand as a reminder to create a classroom culture where responding to books is encouraged, celebrated, and practiced to enrich the next generation of students who love to read.

This research also leaves me with lingering questions on how best to support teachers' individual and collective reading practices. I question how to continue such narrative inquiry with teachers in future research projects. How can the knowledge created by reading practices be valued and receive the recognition it deserves in the education system? How can curriculum expectations and the love of reading not only co-exist but better align in order for meaningful classroom reading practices to be supported? These questions support the call for further research on teachers' and students' reading practices.

Final Thoughts

As I write these final thoughts, I look around the room and see bookshelves overflowing with books mostly read and loved, while some wait patiently for me to bring them to life. Browsing the titles, I remember the joys I shared, tears that fell, and worlds I envisioned walking

in someone else's shoes. My walls are decorated with chart paper, filled with scribbled thoughts, post-it notes and arrows connecting giant question marks. Reading and researching how a handful of teachers feel about reading has taken over my life but I would not have it any other way. My understandings of how teachers engage with books, both individually and collectively, has sparked my desire to continually unpack my responses to the books I read. I wonder how my teaching has been (and will continue to be) influenced with what I have learned through this journey.

As a part-time professor of Language in the bachelor of education program, I believe I have paid more attention to the books that I share with teacher candidates as well as embody the notion that reading continues beyond the last page of any book. I continue to talk to my students about what I am reading, both individually and collectively with my book club. I also discuss what reading stances look like along the aesthetic-efferent continuum and the pedagogical implications of varying approaches to text. One of the first activities I facilitate in the course is the writing of a literacy narrative that allows students to reflect on their experiences with literacy and how these experiences impact their current views on teaching and learning. On the last day of class, we revisit the narratives and reflect how their views have shifted throughout the course and I found this to be a very meaningful practice. Further, I work to create a space where students feel supported to inquire into their reading practices; face their own values, assumptions and motivation; and take risks in their reading and learning. This past year, a group of students in my class formed their own book club to delve deeper in their reading; an idea that may have been cultivated or at least encouraged through class discussions. I have yet to create book clubs in my class as a pedagogical approach but I am inspired to do so and anticipate that I will feel more confident with the knowledge that I have gleaned from this study. I also have pedagogical

approaches and implications from this study, which seek to instill a love of reading in the classroom, to share and encourage with my future students.

Finally, I have new and exciting titles to suggest to my book club and to further my own reading, one of which is *No Great Mischief* (McLeod, 1999) which was a favourite among many participants. I have just finished this month's pick, *Annabel* (Winter, 2012), and I look forward to engaging in discussion at our upcoming meeting and continue the reading process beyond the last page.

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A Fine Balance, Rohinton Mistry
American Psycho, Bret Easton Ellis
Away, Jane Urquhart
Eat, Pray, Love, Elizabeth Gilbert
Fifty Shades of Grey, E.L. James
House Rules, Jodi Picoult
Imagine: How Creativity Works, John Lehrer
I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza's Doctor's Journey, Izzeldin Abuelaish
Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest disaster, Jon Krakauer
Into the Wild, Jon Krakauer
Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896-1899, Pierre Berton
Little Women, Louisa May Alcott
Lolita, Vladimir Nabokov
Lullabies for Little Criminals, Heather O'Neill
No Great Mischief, Alistair McLeod
Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck
On Canaan's Side, Sebastian Barry
Oryx and Crake, Margaret Atwood
Red Dragon, Thomas Harris
Remembering the Bones, Frances Itani
Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare
The Birth House, Amy McKay
The Book of Negroes, Lawrence Hill
The Book Thief, Markus Zusak
The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven, Kevin & Alex Malarkey
The Devil's Teeth, Susan Casey
The Five People you Meet in Heaven, Mitch Album
The Glass Castle, Jeanette Walls
The Golden Spruce, John Vaillant
The Human Stain, Philip Roth
The Imposter Bride, Nancy Richler
Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston
The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini
The Power of Myth Joseph Cambbell
The Power of One, Bryce Courtenay
The Red Tent, Anita Diamant
The Secret Life of Bees, Sue Monk Kidd
The Stand, Stephen King
The Taming of the Shrew, William Shakespeare
Too Close to the Falls, Catherine Gildiner
War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy
Wild, Cheryl Strayed
Wolf Hall, Hillary Mantel

Women Who Run With the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Children's Books/Young Adult Fiction

365 Bedtime Stories, Nan Gilbert

A Fish Out of Water, Helen Palmer & P.D. Eastman

Anne of Green Gables, Lucy Maud Montgomery

Blubber, Judy Blume

Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis

Go Dog Go, P.D. Eastman

Grimm Fairy Tales, Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm

Hatchet, Gary Paulsen

Parvana's Journey, Deborah Ellis

Nancy Drew, Carolyn Keene

Number the Stars, Lois Lowry

Maus: A Survivor's Guide, Art Spiegelman

Mud City, Deborah Ellis

Murder on the Canadian, Eric Wilson

My Side of the Mountain, Jean Craighead George

Speak, Laurie Halse Anderson

Street Pharm, Allison Van Diepen

The Breadwinner, Deborah Ellis

The Butterfly Lion, Michael Morpurgo

The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins

The Secret Garden, Frances Hodgson Burnett

The Sign of the Beaver, Elizabeth George Speare

The Twilight Saga, Stephanie Meyer

The Westing Game, Ellen Raskin

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Information

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to read this information sheet and learn more about my research project. I am a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. I am seeking teachers who belong to an English speaking book club to volunteer in my study about the functions and uses of the collective reading experience. The purpose of this study is to explore potential links of teachers' experiences in book clubs and how these experiences influence pedagogical practices in the classroom. I am looking for interested and willing participants to participate in this study limited to teachers who teach at an Ontario publicly funded school and belong to an English speaking book club. I am seeking to recruit 8-12 participants who will be welcomed on a first come, first served basis.

Your participation will require 1-2.5 hours of your time. You will be asked to do the following:

- 1) meet me at a location convenient to discuss your experience as a reader within the book club which you belong to
- 2) complete a demographic questionnaire (5- 10 min)
- 3) participate in an in-depth interview (30-60 min),
- 4) complete and a written reading interest profile (30- 60 min) which can be e-mailed after the interview
- 5) possibly invite Jennifer Rottmann to one of the book club meetings if, and only if, permitted by the members of the club (note: this is only an option and does not necessitate participating in the study).

Our conversation will be audio-taped and later transcribed by me. Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form; however your name will be removed from the data during the transcription process and will not be linked to the data in any reporting of the findings. Your identity will be protected by a pseudonym and all contents of the interview will be kept in a locked cabinet and password protected computer. However, due to the local nature of a book club, I cannot guarantee absolute anonymity and confidentiality, as members are well known to each other already in advance of the study. If this is a concern, you have the right to withdraw and data collected up to this point will be destroyed. Only myself and my thesis supervisor, Dr. Cynthia Morawski, will have access to the data.

There are no risks associated with involvement in this project aside from those experienced in everyday life. There are many benefits to this study. This is an opportunity to engage in reflective practice and explore your pedagogical practices.

Your participation in this study is optional and entirely voluntary. It is your right to ask the researcher about any aspects of the study at any time. During the interview you have the right to refuse to participate and answer questions and you can withdraw from the study at any time without suffering any negative consequences. If you withdraw, you may request that all data gathered up to that point be destroyed.

As a token of my appreciation, I am offering participants a 25\$ gift certificate to a book store.

Should you have any questions about this project, please do not hesitate to contact myself, Jennifer Rottmann, at _____ or by email at _____ or my supervisor, Dr. Cynthia Morawski at _____ or my email at _____.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Rottmann
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa

APPENDIX B
Understandings of How Teachers Use the Collective Reading Experience
Participant Consent Form

Contact Information :

Principal Investigator
Jennifer Rottmann

Supervisor
Dr. Cynthia Morawski

Dear Teacher Participant:

I have been invited to participate in Jennifer Rottmann's doctoral research project at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

The purpose of this study is to explore potential links of teachers' experiences in book clubs and how these experiences influence pedagogical practices in the classroom. I am a teacher who teaches at an Ontario publicly funded school and belong to an English speaking book club.

I am willing to participate in the following requirements:

- 1) meet at a location of convenience to me to discuss my experience as a reader within the book club which I belong to
- 2) complete a demographic questionnaire (5 min)
- 3) participate in an in-depth interview (30-60 min)
- 4) complete and a written reading interest profile (30- 60 min) which can be e-mailed after the interview.
- 5) possibly invite me, Jennifer Rottmann, to one of your book club meetings if, and only if, permitted by the members of the club

My participation in this research is completely voluntary. I am free to withdraw at any point. I can ask questions at any time, including during the research. I am also allowed to refuse to answer any questions. If I choose to stop participating, or refuse to answer certain questions, there will be no negative consequences. I have also been assured by the researcher that even though interviews will be recorded using a digital recording device, my identity will be protected by a pseudonym and the contents of my participation will remain confidential. However, due to the local nature of a book club, I understand anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, as members are well known to each other already in advance of the study. If this is a concern, I have the right to withdraw and data collected up to this point will be destroyed. My identity will not be divulged in the data or in any published work that makes use of this data.

There are no risks associated with involvement in this project aside from those experienced in everyday life. There are many benefits to this study. This is an opportunity to engage in reflective practice and explore my pedagogical practices.

The interviews will be digitally recorded and stored as electronic sound files on password computer only made accessible to the principal researcher. All transcripts and reading interest profiles will be stored as electronic files as above and as hard copies in locked file cabinets in the home of the principal investigator. All names and identifying features will be removed during the transcription process. The data will be analyzed and processed using computer software and the findings will be saved electronically. Data will be stored securely for a period of five years beyond the life of the project at which time electronic files will be deleted and hard copy files shredded.

I, _____ agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Jennifer Rottmann, PhD Candidate of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Should I have any questions about this project, I can contact, Jennifer Rottmann, at _____ or by email _____ or her supervisor, Dr. Cynthia Morawski.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5. Tel.: (613) 562-5387. Email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C
Advertisement Script

My name is Jennifer Rottmann and I am a PhD Candidate at the Education at the University of Ottawa. I am seeking teachers who belong to an English speaking book club to volunteer in my study about the functions and uses of the collective reading experience. The purpose of this study is to explore potential links of teachers' experiences in book clubs and how these experiences influence pedagogical practices in the classroom. I am looking for interested and willing participants to participate in this study limited to teachers who teach at an Ontario publicly funded school and belong to an English speaking book club. I am seeking to recruit 8-12 participants who will be welcomed on a first come, first served basis. I would require about 1- 2 hours of your time to participate in a demographic questionnaire, an interview that would be audiotaped and a written reading interest profile that can be emailed to me after the interview is finished. I would also be interested in attending a book club meeting if all members agree to this. I am offering a 25\$ gift certificate to a book store as a token of my appreciation for participating in this study.

If you are interested in participating in my research project, please contact me.

APPENDIX D
Recruitment Email

(to be used by my colleagues who are teachers to pass on to their colleagues who are in book clubs)

Dear Teacher,

Jennifer Rottmann is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. She is currently seeking teachers who belong to an English speaking book club to volunteer in her study about the functions and uses of the collective reading experience. The purpose of this study is to explore potential links of teachers' experiences in book clubs and how these experiences influence pedagogical practices in the classroom. She is looking for interested and willing participants to participate in this study limited to teachers who teach at an Ontario publicly funded school and belong to an English speaking book club. She is seeking to recruit 8-12 participants who will be welcomed on a first come, first served basis. Participation in the study will require approximately 1-2.5 hours of your time.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact Jennifer.

APPENDIX E
Photograph Release Form

I, _____ permit Jennifer Rottmann to take photographs in the interior of my house for the purpose of her doctoral research work. I understand that these photographs will be used in her research project and any potential publication of her work in the future.

Should I have any questions about this project, I can contact, Jennifer Rottmann, at _____ or by email at _____ or her supervisor, Dr. Cynthia Morawski at _____.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5. Tel.: (613) 562-5387. Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F
Book Club Members Information Email and Consent Form

Dear Book Club Member,

I would like to thank you for inviting me to participate as a honorary member in your book club meeting. I am a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa and conducting research on the potential links between teachers' experiences in book club and how they approach and teach reading in their respective classrooms. My attendance at the meeting is to contextualize myself and experience the book club. Prior to the meeting, I will have read the book club selection and will participate as a permitted guest during the book club discussion. I will not be audio-taping these meetings nor taking any detailed notes of what is discussed in the book club other. These meetings will not be used as a data collection point other than my own experience of the meeting (i.e. there will not be any direct quotes taken from the meeting). If permitted, I may take photographs of the setting (i.e. format of the chairs, stacked books, etc.) but not of the any persons (please see photograph release form).

I, _____ agree to have Jennifer Rottmann, PhD Candidate of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, participate in the book club meeting.

Should I have any questions about this project, I can contact, Jennifer Rottmann, at _____ or by email at _____ or her supervisor, Dr. Cynthia Morawski at _____

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5. Tel.: (613) 562-5387. Email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G
Demographic Questionnaire

1	Age
2	Gender
3	Languages spoken at home
4	Highest level of education <input type="checkbox"/> College diploma <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral degree
5	According to your OCT Certificate of Qualification, which division(s) are you qualified to teach? (Check all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> Primary <input type="checkbox"/> Junior <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Senior
6	How many years of teaching have you experienced?
7	What grade levels (or subjects) do you currently teach?
8	How many book clubs have you belonged to including your current book club?
9	Why did you join your current book club?

APPENDIX H

Interview Protocol

I will use the following questions/probes to guide the in-depth, semi-structured interviews during that are expected to last 30-60 minutes in length and will be conducted in a quiet, private place of the member's choice. Interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed by me.

1. What are the criteria for book selection? (popular author, literary prize winner, theme, popular book?) What types of books does this club typically read and why?
2. How would you describe the heart of the book club's operation? What are the aims and goals of the book club and how are these articulated?
3. What are the origins of the book club that you are currently a member of? (how long have you been a member etc.)
4. What do think brings individuals as readers to this particular book club?
5. How would you characterize your reading experience with others in the book club?
6. How do you relate your experiences of reading to conditions of your own life, including everyday worries and concerns and teaching?
7. How do you think reading in your book club differs from reading in school?
8. How do you think your experience of being in a book club affects your teaching? (do you use book club practice in your classroom?)
9. Does reading in a group pose particular challenges or feelings of pleasure or power for you and if so, how?

Questions to be asked if the interview follows a book club meeting which I have attended:

1. How do you feel you related to the previously selected book? (in terms of characters, author, plot, theme?)

2. How do you feel discussing the book within the meeting change/alterd enhanced your interpretation of the book?
3. What affect do you feel discussing the book with members has on your self-identity as a reader and/or teacher?

APPENDIX I

Reading Interest Profile

This reading interest profile is an opportunity for you to reflect on your reading experiences and for me to gain an understanding of your reading interests. This could be a reflection of your past reading experiences, what types of books you enjoy or do not enjoy reading, and any other experiences that you feel you would like to share. Questions to guide you could be (but not confined to):

1. What are your earliest recollections of reading? Describe one or two of these early reading memories including how old you were and who you were with at the time.
2. What types of books do you typically enjoy reading?
3. What types of books do you not enjoy reading?
4. What is your favourite book and why?
5. Who is your most memorable literacy teacher and why?
6. What experiences have you faced in becoming a reader?
7. What does reading mean to you, both individually and collectively (e.g. in a book club)?

APPENDIX J Nvivo Nodes

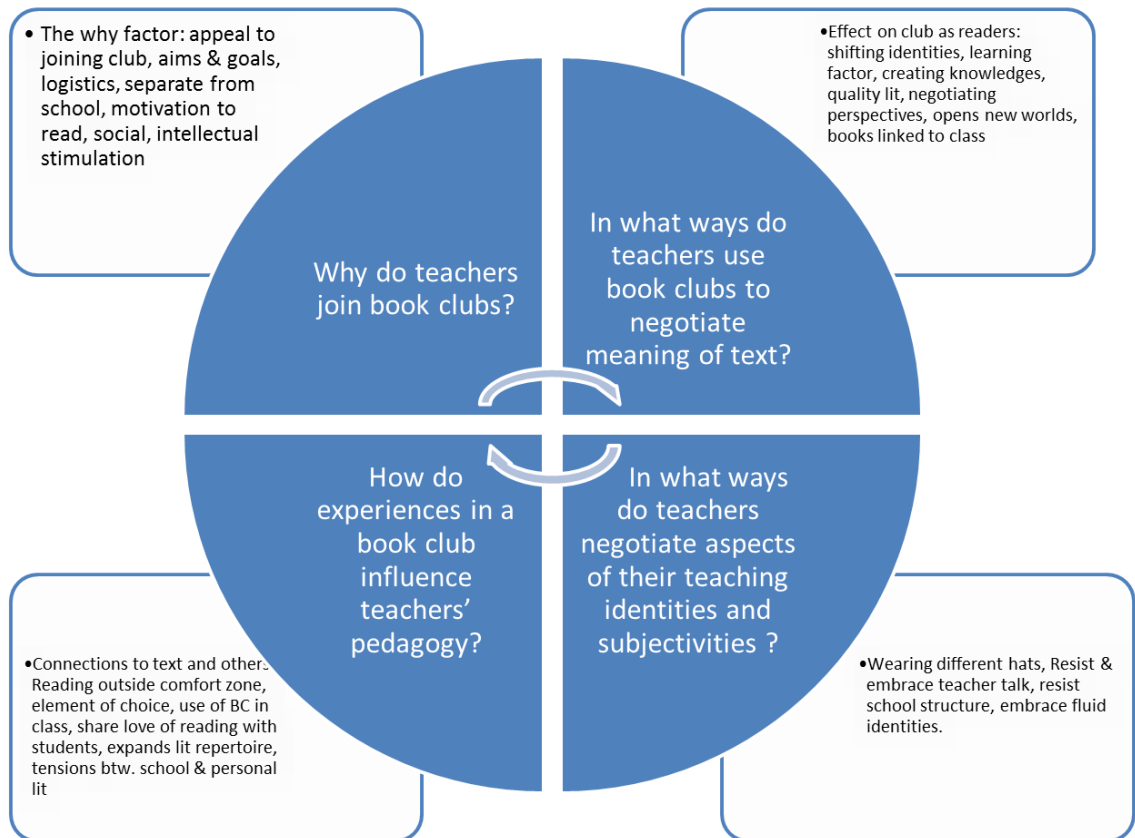
Look for: Search In

Nodes

Name
<input type="checkbox"/> Aims, Goal and Agenda of Club <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Connections<input type="checkbox"/> Uses of the club<input type="checkbox"/> Why join a book club<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Good Books<input type="checkbox"/> No Judgement
<input type="checkbox"/> BC affect on identity as a reader
<input type="checkbox"/> Challenges to BC participation
<input type="checkbox"/> Consumption of books and food
<input type="checkbox"/> Earliest Reading Recollections <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Most memorable Lit Teacher<input type="checkbox"/> Past struggles or experiences as a reader
<input type="checkbox"/> Favourite authors and types of books <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Adult Lit<input type="checkbox"/> Books of aversion<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Lit<input type="checkbox"/> Touchstones
<input type="checkbox"/> Influences on Pedagogy <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> BC used in class<input type="checkbox"/> Books used in class<input type="checkbox"/> Element of Choice
<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledges valued and created
<input type="checkbox"/> Logistics of Club <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Book Selection<input type="checkbox"/> Comments about meetings<input type="checkbox"/> Origins of Club and involvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Meaning of Reading Collectively and Individually <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Escapism and pleasure<input type="checkbox"/> Reading for the club
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading for school vs for club <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> School Literacies
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching restrictions
<input type="checkbox"/> Transactions with text

APPENDIX K
Visual Diagram of Research Questions

Themes & Research Questions



APPENDIX L
Grace's Grade 10 Book Club Unit

OBJECTIVES:

The student will demonstrate the ability to

- Read and analyze a self-selected novel over a three week period with a peer group
- Discuss plot, character, theme, style with peers
- Reflect on what they have read, how they have interacted, and how they benefitted from group discussion
- Take organized, relevant jot notes during discussion

Important dates:

Choices made: _____

Novel in hand, in class: _____

First set of tickets of admission: _____, second set: _____

final set:

Tickets of admission:

In order to be able to participate in the weekly discussion group and thereby earn marks, you must come prepared with the following assignments done correctly and completely. If they aren't, you will be required to work separately, independently, until they are complete. You will then be allowed to join your group and your mark will reflect the missed time in discussion.

1. Two discussion questions with at least 4 jot notes reflecting on possible answers
2. Two literary passages taken from that week's assigned section, copied or flagged in your text appropriately, with at least 4 jot notes indicating your reason for selection
3. An eleven sentence paragraph outlining your impression of that week's section.

Summatives:

1. Oral discourse mark
2. Personal essay on the experience after we finish the unit
3. Submission of organized, neat book club notes (taken during discussions and tickets that admitted you to the discussion)

Oral discourse rubric

Category	Below 1	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Communication Evidenced through active listening, level of participation, quality of contribution (20 marks)	Very limited to none	Limited	Some	Considerable	Exceptional: leader, encouraged others, insightful comments, very involved but not hogging the discussion

Tickets and club notes rubric

Category	Below 1	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Communication Evidenced through organization and clarity of notes (10 marks)	Very limited to none	Limited	Some	Considerable	Exceptional: clear, clever headings, packaged and presented neatly
Application evidenced through detailed account of information covered (10 marks)	Very limited to none	Limited	Some	Considerable	Exceptional: thorough tickets and details of all three meetings

Choices:

1. *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok: Two fathers and two sons struggling to pursue a religion in a way that best suits them, the teens experience conflict within and against each other and society.
2. *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger: Classic 1951 novel about a defiant 16 year old who is expelled from his 5th prep. school. He runs away to N.Y. city and experiences a mental breakdown. Contains humour and heavy themes. * need parent signature
3. *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* by Mark Haddon **AND** *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes. Curious Incident: An autistic gifted 15 year old boy finds his neighbour's dog impaled on a garden fork and becomes the key suspect. Obsessed with Sherlock Holmes he set out to solve the mystery. Flowers for Algernon: Mentally challenged teen, Charles Gordon becomes the first human test case for an ambitious brain experiment.
4. *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham: In a post-apocalyptic world ruled by a form of fundamentalist Christianity, the main character, a teen, who can communicate telepathically, must hide his secret since it is a blasphemy.
5. *The Secret Lives of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd: Teen Lily Owens' mother died when she was very young. Her death is shrouded in secrecy. Her abusive father, racist society of the southern U.S. in the 1960s, and this secret cause Lily to flee her home. She is taken in by three eccentric black bee-keeping sisters.
6. *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow: A San Francisco teen takes on the Department of Homeland Security after terrorists blow up the Oakland Bay Bridge and the subway system. He and his friends are caught in a web of politics using their computer knowledge to save themselves and others. *need parent signature
7. *Ysabel* by Guy Gavriel Kay: The story tells of 15 year old Ned Marriner who discovers his magical heritage while staying with his photographer father in Provence, France. He meets an American exchange student, the two become involved in an ancient "story" of love, sacrifice, and magic unfolding in the present day, which draws in Ned's family and friends. An interest in mythology would be advantageous to this read.

CHOICE SHEET

NAME: _____

Indicate your top three choices and submit by the due date. Parental signatures are needed for two options. If you don't have a signature, you can't be considered for either of those options.

- Indicate your top choice with the number 1 and your least favourite with the number 3.

_____ *The Chosen*

_____ *Catcher in the Rye* (parent signature: _____)

_____ *Curious Incident AND Flowers for Algernon*

_____ *The Chrysalids*

_____ *Secret Life of Bees*

_____ *Little Brother* (parent signature: _____)

_____ *Ysabel*