

## Selecting texts for English Language Arts classrooms: When assessment is not enough

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*ABSTRACT: This exploratory analysis examines the text selection practices of four pairs of pre-service and in-service teachers during a course on content area reading instruction in English language arts. Each pair independently negotiated responsibilities for selecting the texts used in a series of four lessons. Results of this analysis identify several factors in the process of text selection that may influence the kinds of texts teachers choose for their classrooms, including teacher knowledge of texts, access to texts, and institutional constraints on text selection. The reasoning participants provided for the selections they made also points to the influence of the current emphasis on high-stakes assessment on teacher decision-making. Text selection is explored as a potential site for teacher agency and differentiation of instruction.*

*KEYWORDS: Assessment, content area reading, cultural capital, differentiated instruction, English language arts, Bourdieu, text selection, youth literature, young adult literature.*

*I thought you would be interested in knowing that we got our CRCT scores back yesterday. I don't know how familiar you are with the scoring, but below 800 is not meeting standards, 800-849 is meeting standards, and 850 - above is exceeding standards. Guess what? Student X made an 863 in reading!!!! He exceeded!!!! He scored higher than many of my "good" readers.*

*Lillie, Student X's Classroom Teacher*

Lillie's email arrived in the second author's inbox just weeks after the completion of an online content area reading course in which she had enrolled. A middle-school English language arts teacher, Lillie was obviously elated that the reader with whom she had worked during the semester had passed the state's Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) – a measure designed to assess students' mastery of the state's performance standards. Taking our cue from the object of Lillie's enthusiasm, this paper examines the influence of an

assessment-focused educational system on one aspect of English language arts pedagogy: text selection.

English language arts teachers routinely select texts for their students to read. At times they make their selections based solely on what they see as a fit between their students' needs and interests; at other times, they select texts that their school and/or state curriculum list as required readings. Selecting texts for readers who struggle to comprehend written texts might add an additional set of considerations to text selection. Although instructional materials intended for teaching reading in disciplinary subjects are distinct from those found in beginning reading instruction, the prevailing sentiment among many middle- and high-school teachers is that teaching reading is the job of primary-grade teachers, not content area specialists such as themselves. A few may point to the English department, but as Heller and Greenleaf (2007) have noted, "English teachers tend to regard themselves as content area specialists too, with *literature* [emphasis in the original] as their subject matter" (p. 15). Indeed, earlier conceptions of the English language arts teacher as the stand-in reading teacher seem to be going by the wayside. Even so, readers who struggle to comprehend written texts still need support in the English language arts classroom.

The texts teachers choose to use in lessons with adolescent readers can affect student learning, as these texts determine in no small measure to students' willingness to engage with certain kinds of knowledge. Correspondingly, texts excluded from the classroom can result in gaps in student understanding (Wade & Moje, 2001). Thus, knowledge about and selection of texts is a concern for teacher educators. How teachers negotiate decisions about text selection, the texts they choose to use, and their motives for those choices provide insights into the issue of text selection in English language arts classrooms and the role higher education might play in educating teachers about the text selections they make.

## PURPOSE AND GUIDING QUESTION

The purpose of this exploratory analysis is to identify aspects of the text selection process that have implications for literacy teacher education. The data come from a larger study of an online content area reading course that included in-service and pre-service teachers from each of four content areas: English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.

The question guiding this analysis is: how did four teams of pre-service and in-service, middle-grades teachers select written texts for teaching English language arts to readers who struggle with comprehending these texts? To investigate this question, we focused on the texts the teachers chose, as well as the reasoning the teacher pairs provided for their selections. Although the participants often selected both informational and narrative texts, their selections within these broad categories varied in character with regard to materials drawn from textbooks, children's literature, and workbooks targeting specific reading skills. The genres the participants largely excluded from their selections, such as poetry, drama and digital resources, were also of interest.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" (1986) is a familiar one in educational research (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). The widespread use of the term in educational circles is not surprising, given its theoretical origins. Bourdieu developed the notion of cultural capital as a way to explain the unequal academic achievement of students from different social classes. It is an idea well-suited to educational contexts, especially when considering students who face challenges in meeting the academic demands of school.

Cultural capital is broadly defined as resources, both tangible and symbolic, accumulated by an individual through formal or informal educational experiences. The initial accumulation of cultural capital takes place in the home, through access to these experiences and materials. This accumulation continues through a student's school years, with the process of schooling ideally adding to these personal resources in significant ways. There are a number of reasons why the capital educators aim to develop in schools is uneven in its effectiveness both in the uptake by students and in its exchange value beyond the school walls, a matter that will be discussed in the course of this paper.

Perhaps less well known are the three "states" of cultural capital Bourdieu (1986) discerned through his sociological work. The first of these is the most fundamental, *embodied* cultural capital. As the name indicates, embodied cultural capital refers to the cultural and educational resources actually present in, or embodied in, an individual. These resources are highly variable, accumulating and developed over time. Embodied cultural capital may manifest itself in personally gained informal knowledge as well as skills and learning acquired in school.

The second state of cultural capital is the *objectified* state. Objectified cultural capital refers to cultural objects such as books, art and instruments. Access to objectified cultural capital is advantageous not only for the monetary value of the objects, but also for the symbolic value of their content and use. The ability to benefit from access to objectified cultural capital depends in part on the embodied cultural capital one possesses. For example, to read and gain knowledge from a book written in English, an example of objectified cultural capital, one must have some degree a personal mastery of the English language commensurate with the level at which the text is written, an example of embodied cultural capital. Access to objectified cultural capital is a key concern in classrooms. Inclusion of specific cultural objects, both in terms of physical presence as well as the capacity of students to understand and benefit from interacting with them, can potentially influence the levels of all kinds of capital students are able to achieve both within and beyond the school walls. The specific pieces of objectified cultural capital students work with make a difference in what students can learn and may ultimately be able to do. The ability of specific texts to make a particular difference is a prime reason for selecting one text over another. The analysis reported here focuses on text selection in classrooms and, as such, addresses the objectified cultural capital students have access to as well as the capital resources those texts may translate into.

The third state of cultural capital is the *institutionalized* state. Institutionalized cultural capital is acquired in the form of degrees and other official certifications determined by an external

arbiter, such as a school or other officiating institution. Institutionalized cultural capital is presumed to guarantee embodied cultural capital. For example, if one achieves a high school diploma, it is assumed that one has a certain set of competencies, knowledge and cultural resources to draw on. Other examples of institutionalized cultural capital might be achievement test scores. Although “making the grade” is presumed to guarantee a certain amount of embodied cultural capital accumulation, classroom realities sometimes tell a different story. Still, these external designations of institutional capital matter in any number of fields, such as the connection of adequate test scores with educational opportunities.

Schools are engaged every day in the endeavour of cultural capital development and exchange. All three of these states of capital are at work in any given classroom. When teachers select texts, objectified cultural capital, they may have either the embodied or the institutional cultural capital of students in mind, or both. In this study, we are specifically interested in how these two states of cultural capital affect the process of teachers selecting objectified cultural capital, in the form of texts for their classrooms.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Considerations in the process of text selection take on a different character depending on the point of view of the person making the selection and how the text will be used. From a reading perspective, readability of the texts in the middle-grades, English language arts classroom is an important factor in text selection. There are several ways of assessing the readability of a text. Although less than perfect, no doubt, the textbook selection approaches typically described in reading methods texts focus on indicators of text difficulty (for example, the cloze procedure developed by Taylor, 1953, and various readability formulas). As noted in Alvermann, Phelps and Ridgeway (2007), “[The cloze procedure] applies a kind of Goldilocks test, which suggests whether students will find the book ‘too hard,’ ‘too easy,’ or ‘just right’” (p. 158). Readability formulas (for example, Fry, 1977, 1989) predict a text’s difficulty level by measuring sentence length and the number of sentences within a 100-word sample text. What is masked in readability formulas is the fact that shorter sentences are often times more difficult to comprehend than longer ones, because conjunctions that would typically be in longer sentences are left out, thus leaving it to the reader to make the necessary inferences. Another text selection approach to judging a text’s suitability for a particular group of students is to rely on consumer judgments – that is, teachers’ evaluations of textbooks after using them on a trial basis. Often solicited by interested publishing companies, these self-reports can vary in their usefulness.

Selecting texts to teach the content area of literature brings a different set of concerns and criteria to the selection process. When designing an entire course of readings, overall thematic coherence or topical relevance may come into play. Teachers may also select texts with the aim of exposing students to a wide range of genres. Teachers sometimes select individual texts that they believe will appeal to students based on their own experience. An example of this, what we might call the social-realist approach, is cited later in this study. Another common tactic, one oriented more toward fantasy than realism, is to choose texts that describe experiences that students may find interesting precisely because they will be unfamiliar to them and will therefore open up new imaginative worlds. Another approach is

to choose texts that will appeal on non-experiential grounds, such as imaginative forms of storytelling, or compelling wordplay, or other unusual, innovative features.

The attempt to merge these two sets of concerns, readability and content, is evident in what may be the most familiar text in classrooms, the textbook. The textbook as a medium is not without its critics. Debates over the content and use of textbooks in classroom instruction are longstanding (for example, de Castell, Luke & Luke, 1989; Shannon & Goodman, 1994). Concerns also surround the recent consolidation of textbook production into the hands of a few dominant companies. Although the amount of “literature” in textbooks may have increased over time, the creation of textbooks is still a matter of compromise and their content represents a limited point of view. It is this limited point of view, coupled with the positioning of the textbook as authoritative and “beyond criticism” in many classrooms that fuels much of the concern over textbooks (Luke, de Castell & Luke, 1983).

Despite these worries, textbooks remain the central text in many classrooms. When English language arts teachers do select materials to supplement the textbook, the most common literature found in their classrooms is narrative, often award-winning, fiction. In their study of over 1,700 sixth-graders’ reading interests and access to materials in and out of school, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found a clear mismatch between the broad range of texts students described as favorite materials in their out-of-school reading and the narrow group of award-winning fiction books they identified as enjoyable in their classrooms. Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999), in their study of 35 sixth-grade, English language arts classrooms, also found classroom libraries to be primarily stocked with fiction. This reflects a similar prioritization of narrative in textbooks themselves (Moss & Newton, 2002). Students in both of these studies, perhaps not surprisingly, reported their classroom collections to be their least favored source for reading materials.

Alternatively, informational literature, especially in the form of tradebooks, is well documented in both its importance as well as its absence from classrooms. The lack of attention to informational text in literacy classrooms at all levels is well established (Duke, 2000; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Saul & Deickman, 2005). At the same time, access to informational trade books is an effective motivator for many students (Dreher, 2003; Moss & Hendershot, 2002). Poetry is another genre often overlooked in English language arts classrooms, aside from selections included in textbooks. Poetry has not received the same level of research attention as informational text, but the anecdotal impressions in many articles display resistance on the part of teachers and students when initially encountering poetry (for example, Friese & Nixon, in press; Parr & Campbell, 2006).

Although research indicates that teachers most often include fiction in classroom libraries (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999), the topic of how teachers develop expertise in selecting texts aside from textbooks is not widely addressed by literacy researchers. This may be due more to the predominance of the textbook approach to instruction (and the textbook selection committees that are appointed to make school- or district-wide decisions) than to the assumption that teachers will teach either the canon or the materials their school or district has selected. Alternatively, the dearth of literature on classroom teachers’ text selection processes may indicate that text selection is seen as either uncontroversial or unimportant by reading researchers.

## METHODOLOGY

As indicated earlier, the data for this paper came from a larger study (Alvermann, Rezak, Mallozzi & Boatright, 2007). That study used a multi-case research design (Merriam, 1998), of which one case is the focus here. It involved four pairs of middle-grades, English language arts teachers (three in-service and five pre-service). Each pair participated in a multilevel, mentoring model, with in-service teachers mentoring pre-service teachers, and faculty from the Colleges of Education and Arts and Sciences collaboratively mentoring both groups.

### Participants

Elaine, Katrina, Kerry, Marcus and Tatum (pseudonyms are used throughout) were pre-service teachers who had identified English language arts as their area of concentration prior to entering a middle-school education program in their junior year at a major university in a rural part of south-eastern United States. Angela, Janine and Lillie taught middle-grades English arts in county schools that served mostly Caucasian and African American families, but with a growing number of Latino families represented. Angela/Kerry and Lillie/Katrina comprised two of the in-service/pre-service pairs. Janine's partner teacher, Elaine (a former teacher but enrolled in the pre-service sector of the online course for certification purposes), joined the faculty at Janine's school midway through the semester. Marcus/Tatum were both pre-service teachers but were paired due to the course's uneven enrolment pattern of in-service and pre-service teachers.

Other participants included the online course instructor (a literacy teacher educator of 25 years) and her graduate teaching assistant; an English professor in the College of Arts and Sciences; and four middle-grades students in the teachers' respective schools who were reading at least two grade levels below their actual grade placement, each of whom is referred to respectively as Student V, X, Y and Z for confidentiality reasons.

The first and second authors met in a doctoral seminar led by the second author, shortly after the online course was completed. The first author, a doctoral student in language and literacy education and a school librarian, is interested in resource selection in schools, and how classroom teachers select and use materials in instruction. The second author, one of the course instructors, is a teacher and researcher of content area reading instruction. Their mutual interests in classroom resources and content area reading instruction led to the current analysis.

### Course content

The online reading education course was delivered through Web Course Tools (WebCT). Modules for each of four content areas (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) were constructed by the online course instructors and piloted a year prior to the start of the actual study. Modules focused on the intersection of domain knowledge and content area reading instruction, drawing from the meta-analyses conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000) and other evidence-based approaches to content area reading instruction. Each module contained both practitioner and research articles about a particular

strategy for implementation in content area reading instruction. An assessment module included information on pre- and post-assessment strategies to use with middle-school struggling readers, as well as material for pre-assessing both pre-service and in-service teachers' domain knowledge of the disciplinary areas in which they taught. A document drawn up by the English professor describing the domain of English language arts was also included in the assessment module.

### **Data sources**

Data sources included the course syllabus and other instructional texts; four intervention lesson plans created by each pair based on recommended National Reading Panel (2000) strategies; the texts used in each of those lessons; individual mid-term and end-of-course interviews with struggling readers, pre-service and in-service teachers; pre- and post-comprehension assessments of struggling readers; student artifacts; course products (for example, case reports on the struggling readers); in-service teacher reflections, which detailed descriptions of the implementation of each lesson; course instructors' feedback; and the English professor's feedback on selected intervention lessons.

### **Analysis**

Each pair of teachers developed and implemented a series of four English language arts lessons with a student. The selection of texts for these lessons was not dictated by the assignments in the course. The teacher pairs negotiated those decisions as they saw fit. The first stage of analysis involved identifying and examining the texts, or objectified cultural capital, the teachers used in their lessons. We collected as many of the texts identified in the lessons as possible, then analysed each text's characteristics (for example, genre, content, and level of illustration). In cases where details sufficient for locating the text used were not provided, we relied on the teacher's description of the text.

A second stage of analysis involved seeking statements that indicated the teachers' decision-making processes about texts and text selection. In order to understand the role of texts in the lessons and the perspectives of the teachers on text selection, we analysed the lessons and teacher interview data seeking expressions of attitudes and descriptions of decisions about texts in the lessons. This stage of analysis also identified the member of each pair who made the decisions about text choice for each lesson. Finally, we analysed statements by the teachers regarding their motivations for choosing a particular text. We also categorized each of these expressions according to their valuing of institutional or embodied cultural capital, or both, whenever possible.

Although text selection was not dictated by the assignments in the course, readings and course materials did address text selection at least indirectly. We analysed the materials provided to the teachers through the online course to determine their recommended approaches to text selection, if any. After implementation of each lesson plan, the teacher who conducted the lesson wrote a reflection describing the implementation and his or her thoughts about what the student learned. We analysed these reflections seeking any comments on text choice, including both the impressions of the teacher and the student whenever provided. Evaluative responses from the instructors concerning the pre-service

teachers' lesson plans and the in-service teachers' reflections were also analysed for commentary on the texts selected, as well as interviews conducted with the participants at the midpoint and end of the course. As the final stage of analysis, we compiled a narrative summary of each of the four teacher pairs' text selection processes.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The presentation of findings begins with an overview of the data drawn from course materials regarding text selection. A description of the text selections and approaches of each of the four pairs follows, including discussion of the texts they chose, their reasoning for selecting the texts, and how the texts functioned in the lessons. We conclude this section of the paper with an overview of both the English professor's and the reading professor's comments on the selected texts and the teacher-pairs' approaches to selecting them.

### Approach to text selection as recommended by course materials

The syllabus for the course also discusses text selection and the importance of choosing texts that are motivating and engaging to adolescents for use in literacy instruction. The texts should also be suited to the learner developmentally, culturally and linguistically. The emphasis on engagement and appropriateness indicates the need for active consideration of the texts used in classrooms and movement beyond a "one-size-fits-all" approach to texts. The course also included a number of articles and reading materials that addressed text selection (for example, Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006; Zambo 2005).

### Janine and Elaine

Janine and Elaine began their series of intervention lessons using two texts to focus on a summarization strategy. At the beginning of the semester, Elaine was the pre-service teacher, and as such she planned the initial lesson. Elaine selected the picture book *Smoky night* (Bunting, 1994), stating "our use of a picture book in Lesson 1A is a story that everyone can understand, as discussed in our earlier Zambo article, so that comprehension and vocabulary do not provide an obstacle" (Janine and Elaine, Lesson 1, p. 3). All the pre-service and in-service teachers read the Zambo (2005) article Elaine refers to in a previous week as part of the required readings for the online course. The Zambo article discusses, among other things, why picture books are a way to connect with adolescents who struggle to read school texts.

*Smoky night* tells the story of the Los Angeles riots from a young person's point of view. It won the Caldecott Medal, awarded yearly to the most distinguished American picture book, in 1995. As a Caldecott winner, *Smoky night* is part of the canon of youth literature. In Janine's reflection on the implementation of the lesson, the choice of a picture book appears to have been beneficial. She states,

We read *Smoky night* aloud, alternating between who read each page. Student "X" enjoyed the book and was excited to read it. Every once in a while we would stop and admire the illustrations and talk about specific vocabulary on the page. For example she did not know what the word RIOT meant. We spent time using context clues and the illustrations trying to figure out what it meant together. (Janine, Lesson 1 reflection, p. 1)



The summarizing went relatively well, although the student had to be reminded to focus on the most important points of the story for the summary. The pictures clearly engaged the student, but also distracted her at one point. Janine does not mention that this book is in any way connected to curricular topics being studied in the classroom. It appears that she selected it because it was a picture book with a theme that may appeal to middle-school readers.

Elaine designed a second part of this initial lesson as well, using informational text to create a summary. She selected two short passages from a workbook designed to improve comprehension for special education and inclusion students. The brief passages, each approximately two hundred words in length, were accompanied by a single decontextualized illustration of an animal. Elaine provided no reasoning for this choice of text. Lack of time prevented this second part of the lesson from occurring.

By the time the second lesson was due to be created, Elaine was employed as a classroom teacher at Janine's school. As two in-service teachers, Elaine and Janine decided to take turns planning and implementing the intervention lessons. Janine planned the second lesson using two texts from the English language arts textbook. The first was a one-page folktale, and the second a three-page fable. Each text is preceded by a page with a large, relatively abstract illustration related to the story, but other illustrations are minimal. Prompts with comprehension questions and vocabulary boxes accompany the stories. There is no real indication in the data of why these particular texts were chosen. It is likely that they were the texts being used in the classroom as a part of large group, English language arts instruction.

Elaine based her third lesson on comprehension monitoring, and selected two informational texts for the lesson. She states her rationale for this choice as:

Student V has even more difficulty sorting through a passage when she is reading non-fiction texts instead of stories....Since she needs the most practice reading non-fiction writing and these types of pieces lend themselves to being split into paragraphs or neat sections, we have chosen to use two or three short informational passages as the material for this lesson. (Elaine lesson 3, pp. 1-2)

The first of these passages was example much like the informational text planned for use in lesson 1. Several paragraphs of text accompany a single illustration. The second text Elaine selected was lengthier, and came from a book of reproducibles for comprehension building. In the table of contents of this reproducibles book, each text is aligned with skills and standards. There are no illustrations.

The final lesson used a self-questioning strategy to encourage further thinking about texts. Janine selected two passages for this activity, both from the English language arts textbook. One was a brief informational passage, the other a folk tale, and both were accompanied by a few basic illustrations. As was the case with her previous lesson, Janine selected materials solely from the textbook, and provided no rationales for her text choices.

How did these text selections influence the implementation of these lessons? Student V was not questioned on this specifically, but did make one unprompted comment on the texts that we found telling. In a conversation that started in lesson 3, Janine discussed the difference

between fiction and non-fiction/informational texts with Student V, and identified the social studies textbook as an example of informational text. Student V knew the difference, and then “She mentioned that although she does not like reading her textbooks, she likes both fiction and non-fiction books.” (Janine Lesson 3 analysis, p. 1)

Elaine and Janine did provide insight into the reasoning behind their text choices in their mid-term interview. When asked about English language arts as a content area and how she made decisions about strategies to choose, Elaine replied, “Sometimes it’s good to give them explicit skills rather than simply think about, what book do I want them to read?” (Elaine and Janine, mid-term interview, p. 2). Janine followed this comment up with:

Our literature book is organized by themes, but I feel that with the CRCT [state-mandated assessment] there’s a pull to fit skills in, too. Sometimes you’re looking at certain skills, I mean it’s almost impossible to teach so many aspects (grammar, genre, etc.). I think to fit in everything, it’s difficult. (Elaine and Janine mid-term interview, p. 3)

Overall, this pair stayed close to the textbook and materials created to address the needs of readers who have difficulties comprehending written texts, such as specially designed workbooks and reproducibles, for their choices. Janine, the in-service teacher, planned both of her lessons using selections from the textbook and did not provide any further insights as to why she chose those texts. Elaine, who took a job at Janine’s school in the middle of the semester, chose the picture book at the beginning of the series, then later selected prepared materials designed specifically to boost comprehension. Each member of the pair apparently made text decisions independently. Their choices included both narrative and informational selections. We have no way of knowing how Janine’s choices and approaches may have influenced Elaine as she joined the school community and took the classroom right next to Janine’s. It is interesting, though, that even with the apparent success of Lesson 1’s selection of a picture book, complete with rationale, the selection of a picture book was not repeated. Although there are pictures in the textbook, they are quite different in the way they support the text and the reader from those found in *Smoky night*.

How did this pair choose the texts, or objectified cultural capital they used in their lessons? As their interview comments indicate, text selections were largely based on skills. The skills that drive text selection are, in this case, those emphasized on the CRCT. A simple focus on skills does not tell whether the text selection is based on embodied or institutional cultural capital, but once those skills are aligned with the state assessment measure, we see institutional take precedence over embodied. We can also infer that Janine equates teaching skills with a close adherence to the passages provided in the textbook, and that this consideration drives her text selections. The textbook and the skills align, apparently with the goal of passing the CRCT.

What may not be not aligned, however, is Student V’s embodied cultural capital. We cannot say whether or not these texts were accessible or inaccessible to her due to the embodied cultural capital she possessed at the time of the lessons. What we can say, though, is that the objectified cultural capital of the textbook is not seen as valuable to her. In her comments, she identifies the textbook as a particular genre, and specifically expresses her dislike for it. The textbook is not cultural capital she desires to access or build from. However, this is apparently not considered in planning these particular lessons.

## Angela and Kerry

Angela and Kerry selected texts that were part of curricular units and text studies occurring at the time of the course. Angela, the in-service teacher, dictated all the texts for the lessons at the beginning of the semester. She gave Kerry the unit plans and materials and Kerry planned the lessons using those parameters.

The first lesson used two “articles” about the Gold Rush to teach graphic organizers. This lesson was conducted in a small group, with Student X as a member. The articles were not provided with the lesson plan, but the worksheet developed as a companion to the lesson is a tiered graphic organizer focusing on details and facts about the Alaska Gold Rush. In order for the student to be successful on the worksheet, the original text must have been akin to a newspaper article describing a historical event, dense with facts in a journalistic form.

Kerry planned the second lesson to address a vocabulary strategy. The lesson used a set of word cards and a dictionary to fill out vocabulary squares with the word, the word’s definition, an illustration and a sentence using the word. Angela worked with Student X one-on-one to complete this lesson. However, the lesson did not go as planned, primarily due to the fact that the only set of word cards had been loaned out. Instead, Angela conducted the lesson using Student X’s Babe Ruth biography that she was reading for her February book report. The full title and description of the book is not included in the report, although Angela says, “She seems interested in this book and has not seemed to have much difficulty in reading it. This book is written on about a fourth grade level.” (Angela reflection on lesson 2, p. 1). The lesson went on as planned from that point, with no other major modifications.

The third and fourth lessons were both planned using the same text, *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990). According to Angela, “This is a novel which most students can read fairly easily. It is also appealing to most 6th graders.” (Angela reflection on lesson 3, p. 1). We have no way of knowing whether this text was read by other classes as a part of school curriculum, but as a Newbery Medal winner, *Maniac Magee* is included in the “canon” of children’s literature and is read widely in American schools. Angela conducted the third lesson with the whole class. Kerry planned a lesson that required students to summarize each of the first ten chapters of the book and give each chapter a title to capture the main idea. The fourth lesson examined the text structure of Spinelli’s novel, using worksheets Kerry created to map the sequence of events and compare and contrast parts of the story.

To characterize the overall strategy of this team, Angela made the decision to stay close to the curriculum in her classroom for the lessons planned to assist Student X. She includes both narrative and informational texts in her selection. The narrative text is an award-winning book widely used in American classrooms, but the informational texts are not well described. Indeed, perhaps most notable in Angela’s descriptions is the relative lack of emphasis on the texts used. We never see the actual “articles” used in lesson one, and she does not include the title of the Babe Ruth biography used in lesson 2. Thus, we might infer that the texts in these lessons seem to play a peripheral role at best. In other respects, Angela seems to value individualization of instruction. When asked about the effectiveness of involving a real student in the study, Angela replied, “every child has unique problems that need to be

addressed and pre-service teachers need to see that one solution doesn't fit all. I do think it's important." (Angela mid-term interview, p. 2). When she suggested that Kerry design a lesson using graphic organizers, she did so based on her knowledge of Student X's strengths in mathematics. It is not that Angela is inattentive to Student X as an individual, but for some reason, changing the text itself is not a move she considers.

Because Angela dictated the choice of texts from the start, we know comparatively little about Kerry and the choices she might have made were she given the opportunity. She followed Angela's lead on text selection and apparently did not depart from those choices in her planning. Kerry, who was responsible for constructing the pre-test, asked the professor for assistance in locating a text for the pre-test, so she had little opportunity to seek and select appropriate texts for the class assignments.

With so little insight into text selection by this pair, it is difficult to discern what state of cultural capital they hoped to build through the texts they used. It is difficult to know how they understood the role of texts in the classroom at all. The lack of attention to text selection, and the reduced emphasis on decision-making, suggest a belief that text selection is not a critical decision to consider when addressing the needs of a specific reader. The text is not something to be changed except in extenuating circumstances. The texts shared by the whole class in instruction are sufficient to meet the needs of every member of the class.

### **Lillie and Katrina**

Lillie and Katrina approached the element of selecting texts for the lessons differently from the previous two pairs. Lillie, the in-service teacher in the pair, apparently "assigned" Katrina to determine and locate the materials for the intervention lessons. In fact, Lillie sees this as an important part of the planning, stating "I like the format you have where she's responsible for looking up things...like I told her we were studying the Iditarod. And that we needed a biography. And so she just kinda went on those themes and that she could pick what she wanted to teach." (Lillie mid-term interview, p. 1). For Lillie, selecting texts is a part of selecting what to teach.

For the first lesson, focusing on summarizing, Katrina chose the picture book *Togo* (Blake, 2002). In her mid-term interview she describes the text as "a story that kind of went along with the curriculum they were doing at the time." (Katrina mid-term interview, p. 4). Lillie read the text aloud to Student Y, then engaged him in a summarization and main idea activity. At the completion of what appeared to be a very successful lesson, Lillie asked Student Y why summaries are important to know how to do. He replied, "So we can tell somebody else about a good story we heard." (Lillie lesson 1 reflection, p. 1).

Katrina planned the second lesson using two, picture-book biographies, *Martin Luther King, Jr., Man of Peace* (McKissack & McKissack, 1999) and *Young Fredrick Douglass: Freedom Fighter* (Woods, 1997). As Katrina states in her lesson plan focusing on graphic organizers, biographies were a topic of study in the classroom, and this activity was designed to give Student Y a chance to work with biographies in a one-on-one setting. Student Y was reading a book on Martin Luther King, Jr. at the time in class, and learning more about him as well as Frederick Douglass sparked his enthusiasm. It is not clear whether this topical coincidence

was happenstance or by design. Either way, the text did not get in the way of Student Y's engagement with the lesson, and may have enhanced it. As Lillie described in her reflection "He loved this book!!! He couldn't believe all of the things that Douglass had to endure as a slave. He wanted to discuss and ask questions like 'Why didn't the whites want to teach the blacks to read?'" (Lillie, Lesson 2 reflection p. 2).

In the third intervention lesson, Katrina selected *The dove dove: Funny homograph riddles* (Terban, 1988) to focus on vocabulary. Student Y and Lillie played a concentration game with homographs and then completed vocabulary squares. Neither Katrina nor Lillie discussed their selection of this text in the data. The fourth lesson used a passage drawn from an educational website called "Decisions, Decisions." According to the website, the text was designed for sixth-grade comprehension building. This narrative passage contained numerous characters, numerous instances of what Lillie described as "very challenging" vocabulary (Lillie lesson 4 reflection, p. 1), extensive dialogue, and was not illustrated. Interestingly, the research Katrina cites in her rationale points to the importance of text structure knowledge in work with expository text, but the text she selects is narrative. Student Y became frustrated when the process did not mesh well with the text in the lesson. This strategy was identified as being the least successful in the case report written by the pair, where they also state, "Having a struggling reader identify the textural structure, or how the author chose to write the text, is unnecessary to the comprehension of the given text. Teaching summarizing or cause and effect through this story would have been a better use of Student Y's learning time." (Lillie and Katrina case report, p. 10).

Lillie and Katrina also chose both narrative and informational texts. Katrina took the lead in these decisions. Katrina may have been at an advantage when given the chance to select the literature. In her mid-term interview, when asked about choosing her areas of concentration, she said, "I've been in a lot of Children's Lit classes and this reading class, I'm kind of leaning toward Language Arts." (Katrina mid-term interview p. 2). Presumably, her knowledge of children's literature enabled her to make informed selections of texts. The picture book Katrina chose was not a major award winner, but simply an informational picture book connected to the curriculum.

Several other comments during the lessons connect to the texts Katrina chose for the lessons. In lesson 1, using *Togo*, we note that the strategy is meaningful to Student Y because the story is "good" enough to share. According to Lillie, prior to this lesson she had been trying to get Student Y to write summaries all year with disappointing results. Although we cannot attribute the success of Student Y to the story selection alone, we can see from his comment that the text did not detract from his understanding of the strategy and its relevance. As Lillie reports, the connection with a larger curricular topic that Student Y knew about and was interested in appeared to engage him in the lesson.

This is in sharp contrast to lesson 4. In that lesson, the text was problematic, not effectively selected, and may have impeded comprehension. Interestingly, in Lillie's reflection, the barriers the text presented were not considered as potential parts of the problem. Instead, she identifies the strategy as the issue in the lesson. This may be true, but it is surprising that the text was not also the object of her scrutiny. The first three lessons used picture books, and the

last did not, and yet differences in text choice are not identified as a possible source for the difficulties the student faced in the final lesson.

Because Katrina took primary responsibility for text selection, we know comparatively little about Lillie and what she might have used or chosen. She does share her thoughts on text selection through this quote, from her mid-term interview.

As far as text for Student Y depends on what kind of lesson I'm going to be teaching. For example, if I am going to do something where I can introduce some new vocabulary, then I'm going to pick shared reading. But if it's something I want him to read to me, then I want him to pick a book to his liking, and on his level. I'm not sure that's what you have in mind. You know you think about what is the skill and then you search for a book that teaches that skill. Some people will just choose a book and say what kind of skills can I pull out of it. That's what we did for so many years with whole language. It had its good and bad points, but what I found is that you're catering to that book and not the child. For example, this year I wanted them to understand historical fiction as a genre. I had to search for a text that would match a skill. (Lillie mid-term interview, p. 2)

Similar to Janine and Elaine, Lillie talks about skills as a driving force in her text selections. However, for Lillie, addressing skills does not equate to reliance on textbooks and materials that are created for classroom skill practice. Instead, Lillie talks about the "search" for a text that matches the skill. She differentiates between catering to the book and catering to the student, and gives the student priority.

In her interview, Lillie expresses an interesting balance of capitals. She has a multifaceted strategy for selecting objectified cultural capital that depends on the intent of the lesson, the skills she intends to teach, and in certain cases, the interests of the student. In her approach to the course assignments, she let Katrina know that the curriculum allows for flexibility in text selection. We believe that Lillie wants her students to achieve. She never connects her teaching decisions specifically with higher test-scores, emphasizing institutional cultural capital, but her mention of skills at least alludes to it. In her emphasis on catering to the child, she shows that her attention is also directed to the embodied cultural capital of each student. The objectified cultural capital she employs in the classroom is aimed at both institutional and objectified cultural capital for the students, so that they will learn things that are personally relevant, while also negotiating "passing the test".

As Lillie shows Katrina that there is room for text choice in the curriculum, she also evidently teaches Student Y strategies for selecting texts. If Student Y has to read aloud, he is encouraged to choose a text he likes that is also "on his level," taking the readability of a given text into consideration. She teaches strategies for selecting objectified cultural capital that allow Student Y to access engaging information, or embodied cultural capital that he wants to build. In Lillie's estimation, text selection is an important skill for both a novice teacher and a student to learn.

### **Marcus and Tatum**

Marcus and Tatum were in a unique position as two pre-service teachers working as a team in the study. Marcus was working on his Master's at the time, so he was assigned to teach the

lesson to the struggling reader identified by a local school, while Tatum designed the lessons, including the selection of texts. The fact that neither of these teachers was supervising Student Z in his classroom apparently left Tatum free to select texts as she saw fit.

Tatum planned the first lesson using two issues of *Boys' life* magazine as well as a passage from Student Z's textbook to teach a comprehension monitoring strategy. Her rationale for using the periodicals is:

In the article "It's not on the list: An exploration of teachers' perspectives on using multicultural literature" by Stallwort [sic], Gibbons, Fauber, the authors state that "teachers should consider students' interest carefully when choosing works for inclusion in the curriculum." (pg 478) Since I do not know Student X's interests, I am providing two magazines that have a variety of articles, one of which I am hoping he will be interested in. (Tatum Lesson 1, p. 1)

She also includes her thoughts on a pedagogical benefit of using texts chosen by Student Z: "I feel that practising the strategies with a 'recreational' piece from the *Boys' life* magazine will help the student become familiar with the strategy before using it with a typical classroom piece." (Tatum Lesson 1, p. 1). In actuality, time for the lesson ran out before the strategy was applied to the textbook passage. Tatum's text selection shows her belief in the importance of student choice, and she does not mention the student's reading level in her decision-making process or the consideration of genre.

The second lesson taught a self-questioning, strategy using an excerpt from a narrative entitled *The Cay* (Taylor, 1998). Tatum planned a second segment of the lesson utilizing a section from the textbook, but this part of the lesson was not implemented owing to lack of time. We gain insight into this text selection from Tatum's mid-term interview, where she discusses her desire to know Student Z's interests. She asked Marcus to investigate this, and when the graduate teaching assistant questioned her on whether Marcus had shared ideas with her, she replied:

Not really, um, I've gotten, you know, "This is some of the stuff he's interested..." He gave me, you know, I asked him at the beginning of the semester, you know, talk to him, find out, you know, what's he interested in, what does he like, and I get...one response. "He's into African-American poetry." "Okaaay...is there anything else? Does he like football? Does he like cars? Does he like girls?" (laughs) Um, so that really didn't help me at all as far as, cause of my...I really wanted to pull in his interests. And find readings that interested him. And that really didn't help me out too much. (Tatum Mid-term Interview, pp. 5-6)

We wonder at this point whether African American poetry was an unfamiliar subgenre to Tatum, or a set of materials she did not have access to. In any case, she selected a text in lesson 2 that has a Black main character, presumably as a way of responding to Student Z's preferences.

Tatum's third lesson approached summarizing with a text entitled "Malindy and Little Devil" from *Her stories: African American folktales, fairy tales, and true tales* told by Virginia Hamilton (1995). Tatum says little about how she selected this particular tale, although clearly the consideration of African American culture plays into her decision-making. Her final lesson used the reflecting on reading strategy with two poems from *Honey, I love and*

*other poems* (Greenfield, 1978). This text is a collection of poems by an African American author. Tatum does not provide her explicit rationale for using this particular text, or the two poems within the text that she chose. However, Tatum's lesson plans show her hope that these texts would connect with Student Z's interests and background knowledge. After implementing the lesson, Marcus reported that this choice of text was effective, stating "the poems that Teresa selected were very appropriate for Student Z. Not only were they culturally responsive to his interest in African American poets, they were short." (Marcus and Tatum case report, p. 9).

Although Marcus did not select the particular texts used in the lessons, he does offer his thoughts on appropriate text selection for Student Z in the case report where he states,

After spending some time with Student Z, I found out that he was really interested in poetry concentrating on African Americans. Using this insight, Tatum looked for texts from African American authors. As a middle grades educator, I feel that in order to reach many students, you must get into their "backyard." We must respect our student's feelings and incorporate their interests as much as possible in our classes. (Marcus and Tatum case report, p. 2).

Tatum echoes this sentiment in her mid-term interview, stating,

They want to read things that they see themselves in. And I really liked what it was, one of the articles was sayin' about how so much of language arts is still Shakespeare and all these, to quote the article, Dead White Guys... So I think we need, we need to get that in, we need to have kids be able to see themselves, or at least see something that is familiar to them in a story to get them going, to get them interested, and to hook 'em. (Tatum mid-term interview, p. 6)

Overall, Tatum selected informational text, poetry and narrative literature for the lessons she designed. The first text she chose, a periodical, had an element of choice built in, and the rest of the selections built from Student Z's expressed enjoyment of African American poetry. Tatum planned the first two lessons to include the use of textbook passages as well, but neither of these lessons was implemented, presumably due to lack of time, although Marcus could have reordered the texts in the lesson plan and used the textbook if he chose. Their strategies reflect a belief in the importance of Student Z's embodied cultural capital, both what he brings to the lessons as well as what he might gain from them. Both Tatum and Marcus express their belief in the importance of selecting objectified cultural capital based on student interests and preferences. Neither of them discusses the connection of the texts to topics of focus in the classroom or "skills" per se. They de-emphasize institutional cultural capital in their decision-making process, through their attitudes as well as their clear separation from curricular topics. Their distance from Marcus's classroom environment allowed them to select texts focused singularly on his preferences.

### **English professor's comments**

As a part of the study, a professor from the Department of English in the College of Arts and Sciences evaluated several student lessons based on the appropriateness and use of reading strategies in regard to the study of English language arts. He had access to four lesson plans as well as the reflections on implementation written by the in-service teachers. He was



invited to make suggestions and comments about how the lessons might be improved to meet the goals of English literature as a domain.

The English professor, in his comments, states that many of the strategies used in the lessons seem to be of benefit to the reader. In his view, however, some of the lessons are better aligned than others with the goals of English literature as a domain. For example,

The Blake/*Togo* assignment, again, seems...exemplary in this respect: the focus on particular key words & discussions of their significance, as well as the summarizing exercises, goes to the heart of what teaching English at all levels is all about. There are lots of directions one can go in from this point, but this is where we start. More difficult questions (why this form? why this narrative structure? etc.) are really versions of this central question. And we usually end up at 'why this word?' also.

He positions Lillie and Katrina's *Togo* lesson in contrast to Angela and Kerry's lesson using graphic organizers to investigate the informational text concerning the Gold Rush, stating that the Gold Rush lesson is "more concerned with very, very basic points of information". In a second set of comments, the English professor expresses concerns about the strategies and the "intellectual distancing" in the lesson on text structures using the passage "Decisions, Decisions." He does not comment directly on the text choice, although he makes other suggestions that imply the advantage of other text choices in planning lessons. He writes, "One thing I would suggest is more attention to words....The emphasis on visualization means that the words themselves can get slighted. Sensitivity to language and style is just as important for reading prose as it is for poetry." He goes on to state,

The one thing I'd emphasize...is the importance of attention to language. This may seem to come more easily with poetry – which is one reason for teaching more of it at every level, instead of saving it for advanced students. (I may be missing something here; perhaps poetry is part of the curriculum already?) Poems also tell stories, however, and can therefore be just as instructive on problems of setting, character, and plot. The students might enjoy them, too!

The English professor clearly notices the absence of poetry amongst the text choices. He believes that using poetry, a certain kind of objectified cultural capital, might accomplish goals both addressing institutional cultural capital that will benefit classroom achievement, such as the understanding of plot and setting, as well as potentially increasing embodied cultural capital through the text. Although Bourdieu's own position on the aesthetics of art and literature takes a critical view on sensual pleasures as marks of lower-class, cultural artifacts (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), we believe there is much to be gained in the way of capital through taking pleasure in texts. Indeed, Bourdieu himself addressed the apparent dichotomy between "high" and popular culture as no more than an arbitrary designation, based in part on the desire of higher classes to distinguish themselves (Bourdieu, 2002). Here we depart from Bourdieu's more rationalist approach to aesthetics to defend these textual pleasures as worthwhile considerations, to be derived and enjoyed from a variety of sources. This attention to pleasure in text may be especially true of genres such as poetry, where the focus is placed heavily on the aesthetics of language, although certainly pleasure can be taken from any number of types of texts.

We note here that the English professor did not evaluate the one planned lesson that involved poetry. During the larger study, one lesson from each pair was randomly selected for analysis

by the English professor without concern for the kinds of texts selected. In hindsight, the lessons selected for analysis could have been chosen more purposefully. Still, the English professor's insights about texts, in combination with the fact that only one lesson out of sixteen involved poetry, provide interesting insights into teachers' text selection processes. Marcus and Tatum chose to use poetry because it was a reading preference expressed by Student Z. Although we cannot make a conclusion with certitude, if Student Z had not mentioned poetry as a personal reading choice, or if Marcus and Tatum were not of the attitude that student preferences are an important consideration in text selections, poetry most likely wouldn't have been included in this collection of lessons at all.

### **Reading professor's comments**

The reading professor also responded to the lessons created and implemented by the pairs. Her evaluations focused on the reading strategies for the most part, but she did take the opportunity to applaud the use of informational or expository text in the lesson plans. For example, when Janine and Elaine planned to use an informational passage in their first lesson, she responded by saying,

I see that the 6<sup>th</sup> grade standards do not overlook the importance of expository text. When NAEP 2009 is eventually administered, you'll find that there is added emphasis on expository/informational text. I think this may be a "hard pill" for some Language Arts teachers to swallow; thus, I'm glad to see you are receptive to the idea already.

Although this portion of the lesson was not implemented, using informational text in the plan is a selection that the reading professor encourages. She echoes this encouragement to teach using informational texts in her comments to Angela and Kerry in their lesson relating to the Gold Rush: "Good for you for using expository/informational text. That kind of text structure is going to be prevalent on NAEP 2009, only 2 years away. Children who have experience working with expository texts should do well on the National Assessment of Educational Progress." In these comments, the reading professor connects the use of informational text to institutional cultural capital. The reading professor does suggest the additional use of expository texts to Marcus and Tatum, but it is done in relation to a specific strategy and its potential transferability across text-types and genres:

Tatum had chosen a narratively structured text, so what Marcus did was fine. I do worry, however, that Student Z may not be able to transfer REAP to situations where expository texts are used. Thus, if Marcus continues to tutor Student Z, it may be good to bring in some informational texts from his social studies and science lessons.

The reading professor also offers a comment on the use of poetry by Marcus and Tatum, based on a personal liking for the text selected: "I was hooked. I have the Eloise Greenfield book that Teresa used in her lesson, and I've read it many times when I use it for professional development workshops." Other than these encouragements to use informational text and support of a particular poetry text, the reading professor did not comment on text selection. She only mentioned the selection when it was a text other than a prose narrative.

Both professors represent very different priorities in their text selection recommendations, perhaps reflecting the different concerns about texts that each emphasizes in her or his

teaching. Although they each encourage the participating teachers to make selections other than narrative prose, the reasoning each provides for doing so is quite different. Once again we see the complicated process of making textual decisions with a number of kinds of capital at stake.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The four pairs of teachers in this analysis present a range of approaches to selecting texts for use in English language arts lessons for readers who struggle to comprehend written texts. As the analysis demonstrates, each pair negotiated this aspect of planning in different ways, guided by different assumptions and beliefs about texts and their place in English language arts instruction. The considerations they include in the process of selecting objectified cultural capital provide insights into their thinking about texts, how they should be selected, and how they may benefit the readers for whom they select them.

### **Factors in text selection: The capitals available to teachers**

At the end of this exploratory analysis, we are left with more questions than conclusions. What follows is an overview of several of these questions, in an effort to make visible some critical factors in text selection that in turn suggest directions for practice and future research.

Although text selection was not the focus of the larger study from which the data were drawn for the present analysis, there was an implicit assumption on the part of the instructors that students in the class had been exposed to processes for selecting texts in their previous coursework. This assumption may be unfounded. Katrina mentioned that she had recently taken classes in children's literature, but we have only indirect evidence of the knowledge the other teachers had about the broad range of youth resources and how to locate and select them. Indeed, even though Katrina had taken recent courses in children's literature, the content of those classes is open to question. In general, little is known about the way pre-service teachers are educated about text selection in children's literature classes or other coursework. Although many studies of student reading preferences exist in the literature, how effectively teachers can accommodate those preferences based on their own embodied cultural capital is a matter in need of further study. Examination of teachers' embodied cultural capital regarding texts and their selection would allow teacher educators and researchers to address any gaps in knowledge that might exist.

We are also left with questions about the access the teachers in this study had to textual resources, or objectified cultural capital, in their schools. Indeed, one point we take from the data is that access influences the texts teachers select for use in their classrooms. Certainly, if pre-service teachers do not have access to textbooks or workbook materials developed for skills-based reading practice, they are hardly likely to select those texts when designing lessons, unless an in-service teacher provides them or suggests textbook use. Alternatively, in-service teachers, who often have access to textbooks, can easily design lessons around those texts if they choose. The quality of school and classroom libraries, which can vary considerably from school to school, can also affect the choices teachers make about texts.

It is this element of choice that may present the biggest question at the conclusion of this analysis. Ideally, teachers are knowledgeable about young people's resources and have access to a broad range of texts. However, if they are not in the position to choose and use the texts that match the needs of their students, that knowledge and access are capitals with little value in classrooms. We can only speculate on the policies and approaches to text selection at work in the schools where the participants conducted their lessons. Still, the differences between the in-service and pre-service teachers and the selections they made are striking. Marcus and Tatum, who selected materials separate from classroom influence, and Katrina, who was given some leeway in making decisions about texts, chose very differently from the in-service teachers.

Although there is variability across the pairs, the institutional constraints are still evident. The in-service teachers may not have been in a position to make use of their own embodied cultural capital regarding knowledge of youth resources, or the objectified cultural capital at hand in their school. Some schools dictate the exact texts teachers must use in the classroom with all students. This approach most likely can be viewed as an extension of the standardization movement in schools. In cases where texts are narrowly prescribed, teachers may simply be reacting to school- or district-level policies in the best way they know how. Angela and Kerry's situation seems to be an instance of this prescriptive approach. Angela gives very little attention to the texts she uses, although in her interview she expresses her belief that instruction should be differentiated for each child. It could be that her text selection process is largely dictated by outside influences (for example, high-stakes testing), and she simply passes the books along to Kerry for use in designing lessons around them. It could also be that she had some choice, but her knowledge of resources was limited, or she may have had little access to materials in her particular school. Thus, knowledge of resources, access to resources, and the ability to choose what resources to use are three key elements in the process of text selection. The absence of any of these elements may result in text selections that do not fully meet the needs of readers.

### **Selecting texts in the assessment-driven classroom**

The influence of high-stakes testing is apparently an additional factor in text selection for some of the teacher participants. The students involved in the study were readers who struggled to comprehend written texts. Designations of "struggle" are often made as a result of students' performance on state-mandated tests, and concerns about so-called struggling readers achieving the institutional cultural capital of adequate test-scores shapes decision-making about text selection. In some cases, a teacher may favour the skill-based workbook texts such as those Janine and Elaine often chose, or textbook passages. In other cases, such as Lillie's situation, a skills-driven curriculum may be a factor in determining the uses made of trade books. These divergent approaches, one leading to textbook and workbook passages, the other leading to trade books, represent two different understandings of how institutional cultural capital can be achieved through texts.

The existing research literature suggests that there are particular concerns about the selection of texts for readers who struggle to comprehend written texts. It may be that these students are not given texts that present the kind of embodied cultural capital these readers want to build. In their discussion of working conditions in English language arts classrooms in an

assessment-driven curriculum, Petrosky and Reid (2004) discussed this very possibility, where students who don't score well are given

little experience reading, discussing or writing about substantial texts...It's a case, then, of those who need the most getting the least. Substantial learning experiences resulting from engaging texts in good English language arts inquiry or project-based curricula at the very least offer students opportunities to engage with real texts (as opposed to test-item texts)...Such an environment is quite different from the test preparation that marches students through fragmented, disconnected, individual lessons keyed to standards that are keyed to individual test items (p. 2).

Petrosky and Reid describe the result of these text selections and activities as contributing to a cycle of disconnect from the curriculum by students who are the most in need of engagement. Thus, instead of using the designation of struggling reader as a cue to stay close to the prescribed texts, we might also suggest taking it as a reason to seek alternative texts that include embodied cultural capital that the students want to build. This returns to some of the general guidelines for text selection given in the course syllabus, which emphasize the importance of selecting texts that are engaging and responsive to student needs. At times, this focus on engagement seems to have been lost or overlooked, both by the teachers selecting the texts and the course instructors.

### **Text selection as a site for developing teacher agency**

We offer several concluding suggestions for teacher-educators, who in their role as instructors or as professional development experts, may benefit from knowing more current resources to use with readers who struggle to comprehend written texts. First, we would recommend active teacher inquiry into the quality and support textbooks offer students when compared with other resources. One insight from the data that surprised us was the occasional lack of differentiation between excerpts from the textbook or passages from skill-focused workbooks and those from trade books. At times, participants indicated that the two types of texts were interchangeable in some of the affordances they provided readers (for example, through such features as illustration and engaging content). We would submit that youth literature and picture books offer reading experiences that, selected conscientiously, very often exceed common textbook offerings in terms of both interesting text and, in the case of picture books, illustrative support. Side-by-side comparisons of different types of materials can engage teachers in up-close analyses of the benefits and limitations of different kinds of texts.

Other types of texts, especially those apart from traditional narrative prose, are also potentially beneficial topics for teacher inquiry. Coursework in youth literature may not provide specific pedagogical strategies for selecting literature to serve a variety of students and purposes. As an example, the quality of informational literature has increased dramatically in recent years, but informational resources may still be underplayed in children's literature coursework. Serious study of informational literature for youth is a recent development (Moss, 2003). Most common survey textbooks for children and youth literature place informational literature in a single chapter toward the end of the book, after thorough treatments of realistic fiction, modern fantasy, historical fiction and other genres (for example, Donelson & Nilsen, 2005; Kiefer, 2007; Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008; Norton

& Norton, 2006; Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2007). Thus, simply increasing the numbers of informational texts in classroom libraries is insufficient. Teachers need support in understanding how informational books are effectively incorporated into classrooms (Palmer & Stewart, 1997, 2003; Valencia, Place, Martin & Grossman, 2006). Palmer and Stewart (1997), in a study of informational trade book use in two middle-grades classrooms, found that teachers often used informational trade books in the same way as they would use a textbook or encyclopedia, missing out on some of the more engaging features of the texts. Palmer and Stewart suggest that support for teachers in learning to use trade books to enrich the curriculum is essential. Informational literature has specific characteristics that differentiate it from narrative genres. Once teachers have additional knowledge about the variety and characteristics of informational trade books, they can, in turn, share insights about negotiating informational texts with students (Fang, 2008).

Although poetry often gets higher priority in children's literature textbooks than informational literature, it is still missing from many classroom libraries and lessons. Benton (1984) captured well the long-standing resistance to poetry among educators:

[I]t is rarely the lack of physical resources, though these are not perfect, which presents a problem....It is rather a lack of resources in terms of personal experience of poetry and personal sympathy towards it that are at the heart of the difficulty (p. 326).

As the English professor pointed out, poetry, both classic and contemporary, can be used to teach many literary elements while also providing enjoyable language. Exposure to a variety of poetry along with support for teaching with poetry will allow teachers to make decisions about using poems in the classroom. As was the case for poetry, digital texts (especially those involving multimedia) were notably excluded from the selections teachers made in our study. Given that digital resources are often the texts that are the most engaging to students in the middle grades and above (Alvermann, 2008; Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007), it seems important to note their absence in teachers' text selections.

Approaches focusing on exposure to a broad range of texts with support in learning how to locate and use these texts in the classroom give teachers the chance to enhance their own embodied cultural capital as well. Professional development addressing current trends in diverse types and formats of materials could also demonstrate the use of different resources to meet curricular standards. For example, the school librarian could demonstrate the construction of a collection of resources that address a particular English language arts standard. This collection could be designed to approach a standard including materials with multiple perspectives, genres, formats and reading levels. Other effective means of exposure to the range of resources available and developing teacher knowledge of how the resources may be incorporated into the classroom are considerations for future investigations.

With these explorations, text selection becomes a possible site for teacher agency in the English language arts classroom. The ability to select materials outside a narrow range of texts in the literature classroom allows teachers to address student differences and needs (Agee, 2000). Although the teacher's ability to make their own selection decisions about the texts they use cannot be assumed for every school context, when teachers have knowledge about the range of texts available and the affordances they provide, they may be in a better position to advocate for increased autonomy in relation to text selection decision-making.

Content area teacher educators in English language arts might also specifically address text selection in their syllabi. The assumption that text selection is sufficiently addressed in other course work may be an erroneous one. Even if it were addressed, effectively translating principles of text selection into an environment where students with diverse reading levels and interests are present, may warrant further attention. In this course, the instructors might have provided more concrete suggestions for where to find the texts that they encouraged participating teachers to use, such as informational texts and poetry. They also might have suggested seeking the expertise of others in the school, such as the school librarian.

## CONCLUSION

*Yeah! She passed the CRCT in reading! This is her first time ever to pass the reading portion of the CRCT! We got our scores last Thursday, I was pleasantly surprised to find that ALL but 4 of my students passed. 23% of my students began this school year in 6th grade having failed the reading portion of the CRCT last year in 5th grade, even after going to summer school and retaking the test. I was really worried about the outcome this year, since I have never had this high a percentage of failing students. However, of this same group of students in my 6th grade classes, only 7% failed the reading portion of this crucial test this year! Yeah! I do think that all the extra attention that we showered on Student X for your class really helped her pass.*

*Angela, Student X's Classroom Teacher*

Like Lillie's email, which opened this paper, Angela's unprompted email to the course instructor (the second author) gives us a glimpse into the influence assessment-driven curricula can have on teachers. Specifically, we can see how students' past performances on the CRCT contributed to Angela's concerns for her class at the beginning of the school year. We can also see her elation at the gains her students made in reading by the end of the year. Important as it is to set high expectations for all students, assessment-driven concerns are not enough to explain Student X's progress; nor do they adequately account for how the teachers in our study approached the text selection process. Recalling that Angela, of all the participants, seemed to pay the least notice to the texts she chose, time and personal attention are other means to help students achieve. Such is especially the case if, as we suspect, Angela did not have choices in the texts she used for her lessons. Or, if she did have choices, why she devoted so little time to making decisions regarding text selection is of interest here.

The four teacher-pairs in this study took different approaches to selecting texts, and the states of capital they valued when making their selections. In some instances, most notably Marcus and Tatum's general approach, Student Z's interests and preferences, or the embodied cultural capital that interested Student Z, took precedence. In other cases, such as Janine and Elaine's later choices, the preferences of Student V were downplayed in the pursuit of skills, which Janine and Elaine connected with the institutional cultural capital of test scores. We do not advocate for either of these approaches, which appear to prioritize one state of capital to the exclusion of the other. Instead, we recognize that both of these states of cultural capital are important, and the texts teachers select can seek to build both types of capital by

balancing them in the classroom, text selection process. Identifying ways in which multiple states of cultural capital may be addressed through text selection is a worthwhile challenge for educators and researchers alike. Selecting texts that address the capitals students will need in their lives post-schooling is another pressing need (Luke, 1998). Identifying texts that could prove worthwhile long term is an endeavour that invites contributions from literacy educators in all contexts. As we have argued here, determinations about the texts used in English language arts instruction are most effectively made at the local, even classroom level, keeping the individuality of students in mind. Although assessments may inform such decisions, they are no substitute for a knowledgeable teacher with a variety of resources at hand and the autonomy to use them for the benefit of students.

We conclude our discussion with a new appreciation for the complex nature of text selection in classrooms, a matter that at the outset of this study seemed so commonplace that it escaped our attention. Examining the texts teachers chose for lessons with readers and their motivations for making those choices led us to understand text selection as a multifaceted process – one that presents opportunities for further study as well as a site that potentially offers a degree of agency for classroom teachers. We agree that Janine’s sense of how difficult it is to “fit everything in” is influencing how capitals do (and do not) get exchanged in the English language arts classroom. We also sense that purposeful text selection may be overlooked as a reasonable way to meet many of the goals of assessment-driven English language arts curriculum. A lingering concern is that in some cases, text selection is as invisible to classroom teachers as it was to us before this analysis.

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