Independent Reading and the 'Social Turn': How Adolescent Reading Habits and Motivation Relate to Cultivating Social Relationships

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Abstract

Research suggests that independent reading outside of school is a strong indicator of school and reading success. However, studies also suggest that student recreational reading significantly decreases in the middle school years. This article explores some of the reasons adolescent students choose to read independently or are reluctant to do so. In this teacher research study the author interviewed his former students, their parents, and their current teachers about what motivates adolescents to read or not to read. Evidence from this study suggests that independent reading is intimately connected to various social practices, despite commonly held views that describe independent reading as a solitary activity. Teaching strategies to encourage student motivation are shared.

When other kids get excited about books, that turns kids onto a book. If I can hype a book [and say] 'you've got to read this book,' and they trust me, they'll read it. The main motivator is seeing other kids enjoying a book and hearing another kid talk about a book and say, 'I want to read that book.'

-Sara Jones, middle school teacher

Recent research suggests habits of independent reading, or students choosing to read on their own time, are strong indicators of school and reading success (McKool, 2007; Krashen, 2004; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). Scholars also find that recreational reading significantly decreases in the middle school years (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McCoy, 1991). A growing number of researchers are focusing on crucial questions relating to student motivation and reading habits in the middle school years (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Krashen, 2004; Ivey &

Broaddus, 2001). These studies have found that students who achieved high scores on reading assessments, among other indicators of literacy learning, appeared to have high intrinsic motivation to read, and often chose to read on a regular basis outside of school. Krashen (2004), in his review of literature on independent reading, writes:

The relationship between reported free voluntary reading and literacy development is not large in every study, but it is remarkably consistent. Nearly every study that has examined this relationship has found a positive correlation, and it is present even when different tests, different methods of probing reading habits, and different definitions of free reading are used (p. 11).

Given the complex relationships among independent reading habits, literacy learning, and school success, more research on independent reading practices and reading motivation during adolescence is needed.

It is important to note first that various scholars have defined independent reading somewhat differently. Krashen (2004), for example, prefers the term "free voluntary reading". Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) use the term "leisure reading." Anderson, et al. (1988) use the phrase "reading outside of school" and Manzo & Manzo (1995) prefer "recreational reading." These terms are not always interchangeable. Krashen, for example, assumes that "free voluntary reading" can and does take place in schools, while Anderson, et al., do not focus on reading in school. Nevertheless, each of these scholars refers to habits and behaviors, whether in or out of schools, that involve students choosing what and how often they read.

In this article, I will focus on the term "independent reading," since it is often used in research on reading, as well as in teaching manuals. However, independent reading is rarely defined (Knoester, 2008; Serravallo & Goldberg, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). What then is understood by the term "independent reading"? Taken alone, "independence" is most commonly used in relation to notions of freedom from control (Merriam-Webster, 2003). This meaning is closely associated with notions of individual reason, liberty, and the ability to self-govern; a language, and set of values that became dominant during the French Revolution, and to political discourse in the United States, such as in The Declaration of Independence.

The notion of "independence" is a value closely associated with United States history and continues to influence common sense understandings. In describing American character, for example, historians allude to the rugged individualist - the independent cowboy, pioneer, or settler (Wilson, 1991; Tindall & Shi, 1993). But with romantic portrayals aside, a careful consideration reveals that survival in the early days of United States history included dependence on collaboration, especially for European immigrants, who relied on Native American groups for trade, agricultural customs and

plants, geographical knowledge, and other materials and knowledge for survival. Independence, in this case, and in others I will offer, is more of an ideal than a reality when describing human behavior. It should perhaps be no surprise that the language of independence has been overused and in fact misused in mainstream discourse leading to misunderstandings, including some in relation to reading research and literacy education.

Despite references to independence as a romantic ideal, theorists have recently developed a more social view of human nature and activity. In cognitive science, education, anthropology, and other fields, scholars have drawn on the work of Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, who argued, "it is not nature, but society that above all else must be considered to be the determining factor in human behavior" (as cited by Wertsch, 1985, p. 118). Human nature and cognition cannot be understood by looking solely at one person's behavior, language use, or sense making, apart from consideration of social context. Teachers and parents may desire students to be independent in the sense of growing stronger, more self-reliant, and able to take on more responsibility. However, researchers studying independent reading, and educational leaders who author literacy teaching guides, have unfortunately left the notion of independence untroubled.

This article, based on ten case studies, suggests that overvaluing independence in relation to reading may be contributing to persistent misunderstandings of students' reading habits while ignoring social aspects of literacy. Following the methodology and findings sections, I describe and suggest how independent, or voluntary reading, is part of a process of cultivating relationships, despite the fact that participants in the study often characterized reading as a solitary activity. I then connect independent reading as a social construct with the New Literacy Studies movement, which Gee (1999) refers to as a "social turn" in literacy research and theory. While other studies on independent reading and motivation are consistent with the finding

that independent reading contains crucial social elements, these studies do not focus on this crucial connection, nor point out the counter-intuitive notion that independent reading is part of a social process (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007; Ng, et al., 1998; Gambrell, 1996; Almasi & Gambrell, 1994). I then draw a contrast between the findings of this study and current research on reading that ignores the crucial social aspects of independent reading practices. Finally, teaching strategies consistent with the findings of the study are presented.

Methodology

Site and Participants

As a fourth and fifth grade teacher for many years, before turning to educational research and undergraduate teaching, I often thought about how I could encourage the development of a love for, and commitment to, "independent reading" among my former students. Over the years, I assigned reading as part of homework assignments. However, my thinking about these assignments changed over time, as I implemented and assessed various approaches. I wondered how these assignments either inhibited students' interest in reading or created opportunities for encouragement from teachers, peers, and family members to develop positive reading habits. I did not realize from the outset of this study, however, that I would be compelled to rethink, and redefine, the commonly used term, "independent reading".

The students chosen for this study were my former students from one or two years prior to the beginning of the study, when I taught a combined fourth and fifth grade class at a small public school, "Thoreau School," in a large city in the eastern part of the United States. All names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. I chose to work with my former students since I was familiar with their reading habits and the various reading assignments they had completed in the past, and I was interested in asking them to reflect on various literacy experiences, as well as hear from their parents how the literacy

habits and interests of their children had changed over time. At the time of this study the students were in the 5th, 6th, or 7th grades. The school served a student population that reflected the urban neighborhood in which it was situated: approximately 65% of the students were African-American, 20% were European-American, 10% were Latino/a, and 5% were Asian-American. Approximately half of the students at Thoreau qualified for free or reduced lunch. Thoreau was a small school, serving approximately 200 students in grades K-8, and there were eleven homeroom teachers, in addition to support staff and student teachers.

I taught the six students who were selected for the study for two years (Albert, Mitch, Kobe, Sean, Toni, and Maria), and the other four students (Jason, Elizabeth, Kevin, and James) for one year. In the case of two of the students (Jason and Elizabeth), I also taught an older sibling in years past. In addition to the interviews, I kept in touch with these students and the school by sending periodic postcards to the school, as well as spending at least one full week volunteering full-time at the school each year after I left.

The ten students were chosen based on discussions with their current homeroom or literacy teachers (whom I call "Sara" and "Michael"), to roughly represent the range of abilities and interests, including enthusiasm and reluctance, found among the students at Thoreau School. According to their homeroom teachers, although their reading abilities varied, all of the target students could read most books at grade level, based on running records conducted by their teachers (Clay, 1999).

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, I generated and collected ten sets of interviews, each consisting of a middle school or fifth grade student, his or her parent, and the students' homeroom teacher. The interviews were carried out in person or by telephone, and not in the presence of the other participants, yet I consider them "sets" of interviews because the line of questioning largely focused on the ten students' interests

and literacy practices. I examined each set of interviews to build a fuller picture of each student as a reader, not just from "snapshots" in the classroom or at home, but in terms of habits and abiding interests and practices. Each interview lasted between one half hour and an hour. Recordings, and later transcripts, were made of each interview.

I asked each student about their reading practices and other interests in and out of school, choice and availability of reading materials, reading habits, availability of reading materials, preferred times and places for reading; reading practices beyond books (e.g., church, cooking, instruction manuals, video games), social affiliations, self-perceptions as readers, and feelings about reading. Parents and teachers were asked similar questions in relation to the focal students.

I inquired into possible motivations and uses for reading using a combination of open-ended interview questions and follow-up questions to clarify meaning or expand on participants' responses. I asked whether students were motivated to read assignments from teachers or parents, whether they read because they enjoyed reading, or if it was because reading was connected to another interest or activity. I asked about reading habits during the school week and over the weekend, in school, and over the summer. I inquired into what counted as reading, and what genres of reading were valued in school and at home. I asked about kids' feelings about reading and how these related to their future goals (see Appendix for a sample list of interview questions).

In analyzing the data, I relied on grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1998), a methodology not used to test a pre-existing theory, but rather to develop a theory grounded in the specific data generated in the study. The theory is inductively reached through a process of open and theoretical coding, constant comparison of codes, writing of theoretical memos about the codes, sorting the memos, and creating a hierarchical set of

theories that accounts for all data. Throughout this process, I coded each sentence of the interview transcripts. I sorted the codes into categories. I was admittedly surprised by my findings – specifically the extent to which social interactions were connected to reading.

This research design provided several key advantages. First, few studies compare interviews or surveys of students about reading with those of their parents and/or their teachers. This study did both. This comparison allowed me to corroborate student responses with those of adults who intimately knew the reading habits of these adolescents. Second, this design allowed me to probe deeper into the possible social interactions around reading that may have taken place between students, peers, siblings, parents, and teachers. For example, a parent may have mentioned a particular social interaction not mentioned by a student. Third, my relationship with the participants allowed me to corroborate interview data with my own knowledge of particular student reading habits, and ask follow-up questions that may have drawn out a more detailed response, based on my knowledge of the participants. After narrating a general overview of my findings, I explore independent reading as a social practice.

Findings

Each of the parents and students interviewed in this study reported having books and other reading material in their homes, all of the students had gone to a public library with a parent in the last four months, every student had a quiet place in their home for reading or doing homework, and each parent expressed a strong desire for their children to read more outside of school. These findings are consistent with those of Compton-Lilly (2003), who also examined the reading activities and habits of urban families.

Each of the ten participants read from a variety of materials on at least a semi-regular basis. Six of the ten students' parents reported that their children usually read without being

asked to do so, including during the summer. The remaining four did read on a regular basis, but parents said they had to apply pressure, which sometimes resulted in conflict. These four boys - Mitch, Albert, James, and Jason - reported that they either did not like to read or only "sometimes" liked to read. The remaining six students reported that they liked to read or sometimes liked to read. All but three sets of parents and students reported that the students went through phases of reading more or less. One parent, for example, reported that her daughter, Elizabeth, was in the midst of a "dry spell" after being highly engaged with a particular author for several months. Elizabeth could not seem to find another book she was interested in reading. Five parents or students reported that students read at least one half hour each day (Kobe, Maria, Toni, Sean, and Jason). Mitch and James's parents reported that they read for about a half hour five days per week - often only under duress. Elizabeth formerly read five or six days per week but was now down to two. Kevin and Albert read two or three days per week, Albert read only under duress and Kevin read for at least one hour 2 to 3 days a week and according to his father "got upset when he was interrupted while he was reading."

A wide variety of sources were mentioned for finding books and other reading materials. Eight of the families, all but those of Mitch and Albert, reported that they regularly used public libraries to find books. The source most frequently mentioned was the Scholastic Publications Book Fair held twice each year at Thoreau School. Other sources included the school library, bookstores, friends, teachers, grocery stores, or receiving books as gifts. All of the students reported regularly reading at least one text other than books; this included the boys who reported, "not liking to read." Four students read information on the internet. Four students read video game manuals or magazines connected to video games. One student said he liked to read Yu-gi-oh and magic cards, as well as the mail. One girl liked to read the newspaper, and three girls subscribed to and read magazines.

Four boys enjoyed comic books and graphic novels.

A somewhat surprising finding was the amount of reading parents reported their children did compared to what they did as children. Eight of the ten parents said their child read more than they did at their age. Toni's mother responded to whether Toni read more or less than she did by saying:

So much more. The first book I liked was Siddhartha in high school. You know you had to read Jane Ayre. That got me to love reading. Yeah, [now] I read all the time. I think that's great that at this school, she gets to find the book she wants to read. When I was a kid, I didn't like the books they picked.

Sentiments about being able to choose books were echoed several times by parents. It was only the mother of Albert and the father of Jason who reported that their boys read considerably less than they had when they were children.

When asked if they felt confident about their reading ability, all of the students felt "pretty good," "good," or "okay." As mentioned previously, these students were chosen to roughly represent their age peers at Thoreau School in terms of their reading interests and habits. While some research studies have suggested that reading ability correlates with the amount of "independent reading." My intention was not to question or test this research finding, but to identify other factors related to interest or identity that might lead students to read or not read outside of school. Of course, it is impossible to ignore ability. Albert and James had a history of low confidence and ability compared to their peers. Both of their mothers tied the difficulty they had getting the boys to read to their low confidence levels. Nevertheless, the boys could read and understand most texts at their grade level, according to their teachers, and the boys themselves said they were "pretty good" at reading, while James added that he was "getting better." Meanwhile, other students, such as Kobe and Toni, had also struggled as readers and had previously read below grade level. During the time of these

interviews, however, they were reading at levels commensurate with classmates.

"Independent Reading" as a Social Practice

Most striking in the data were the numerous examples in which reading books and other forms of reading were tied to social interactions. In my set of interviews, I noticed *students seemed to love to talk about enjoyable reading material and made connections to what they read.* For example, when asked whether Toni discussed what she read, her mother replied, "Yeah, she does. A couple times a week she'll tell. If it's a great book she'll volunteer, especially if she thinks I'll like it." Maria's mother said, "Yes. Without asking, she tells me." And Kobe's mother replied, "Yes, sometimes. He explains what he read, he just tells me. He likes to talk about what he understands. Sometimes I don't have time to listen." Sean's mother shared with me how Sean seemed to know and share a lot about what he read. When asked if Sean talked about what he read she said, "Yeah, just this morning, at the doctor's office. The doctor was asking questions and he was referring to things he read. The doctor was so impressed."

Almost all of the students and parents also spoke fondly about reading aloud. Some students still loved being read to by their parent. Elizabeth's mother said,

She's not totally comfortable with chapter books. If I read out loud with her, that's totally acceptable. Right now we're reading *A Wrinkle in Time* together. You know, Elizabeth has always been a girl who wanted to be read to orally. Even from when she was very young. She wanted to be told stories. She wanted to be read to.

Maria's mother said, "Sometimes she reads to me. Yes, and sometimes I read to her in both languages [English and Spanish]." Toni's mother volunteered, "I like those books [realistic fiction] and I'll read it to her, like *The Beekeeper*. I read it to her. I love the characters. I read to her less now, but we still read together."

As Toni's mother pointed out, some books address topics of interest to both parents and students. Kevin, for example, was seemingly obsessed with books and magazines about sports, so much so that his teacher, Michael, insisted that Kevin begin to read books on other topics. However, it is no coincidence that Kevin's father is a sports fanatic and the two of them discuss sports regularly.

Students also read about topics that they could discuss with their friends, peers, and siblings. Albert read and played Yu-gi-oh or magic cards with his friends; Jason, Kevin, James, and Mitch read and conversed about sports; Elizabeth's mother said Elizabeth began reading *Beacon Street Girls* after meeting the author and shared and discussed these books with a "gaggle of girls who were mesmerized." The parents of Mitch, Albert, Kevin, Elizabeth, and Jason all reported that their children frequently read and talked about books that had been recommended by older siblings. Meanwhile, the students with younger siblings reported reading to or recommending books to younger brothers and sisters. In all of the interviews, adolescents seemed to remember who had recommended a particular book long after they had read the book.

When I was their teacher, I asked students to write in either diary- or letter-style in their journals each week. I responded in writing - making connections to things I enjoyed about the book, if I had read it or asking questions if I had not. Three parents believed that the book journal had a strong positive impact on their children's reading. Seven of the adolescents enjoyed the book journals and wished they were still doing them. The three reported that they were glad they were not doing them and strongly objected to the "writing part" of the journal.

In analyzing the data and noticing the many social connections involving reading, I was intrigued that when I asked the students and their parents what they thought motivated students to read, not a single participant referenced social aspects of reading. The most common responses began with "I don't

know," and then other responses emerged— Sean's mother referred to Sean's desire for knowledge. Mitch's mother said the main motivation was fear of punishment. The parents of Albert, Elizabeth, Maria, Toni, Jason, and James said that interest in particular books was their children's main motivation. The fact that none of the parents or students identified social aspects as motivating reading was consistent with my own previous assumptions. Only upon analyzing the data did I recognize the many social interactions that accompanied reading. This is consistent with the theoretical claims discussed earlier - recreational reading is widely *misunderstood* as a solitary activity.

In contrast, Sara Jones, homeroom teacher to six of the students and a teacher with over twenty-five years of teaching experience, recognized the powerful social aspects of reading. Sara identified her most successful techniques for getting students interested in books:

When other kids get excited about books, that turns kids onto a book. If I can hype a book [and say] "you've got to read this book," and they trust me, they'll read it. The main motivator is seeing other kids enjoying a book and hearing another kid talk about a book and say, "I want to read that book."

Sara has witnessed the power of reading and literacy as a social act. She also indicated her understanding that cultivating relationships may be part of what turns kids on to reading. It's useful for teachers to ask themselves questions such as, "What are kids interested in?" "What do kids identify with?" "Is there literature available that fits each child's emerging identity?" "Are there groups of students who will find particular books and topics to be socially acceptable?"

Discussion: What is "Independent" about Independent Reading?

The generation of theory in a grounded theory study, such as this one, occurs around a core category or core variable that accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of

behavior (Glaser, 1978, p. 93). In this study, the core variable and central concern appeared to be cultivating relationships using books or other texts. Put differently, the central theory that emerged from these data and this analysis was that choosing to read, for these adolescents, was connected to desires to cultivate relationships.

I define "cultivating relationships" as enjoying the company of another person, and hoping and strategizing for this to occur again. This involves taking risks, which may result in rejection. I chose the word "cultivating" because this activity implies agency on the part of one who is forming or building a relationship. Thus, the term "independent reading" might be a misnomer. Recreational reading, or free-choice reading, might be better understood as cultivating relationships through literature.

By "relationship" I reference a friendship or association with one of a variety of individuals. These individuals might be parents, peers, teachers, other adults, or younger students or siblings. The strategies used for cultivating one type of relationship may be very different from strategies used for other relationships and these strategies may be in conflict. For example, by cultivating relationships with adults, adolescents may risk endangering relationships with peers. Peer relationships may be fragile and adolescents may be careful to protect these relationships by not risking rejection and choosing to read and discuss books that are popular within peer groups. Book selection can be sensitive and strategic for adolescents.

Adolescents strategically selected, read, discussed, and avoided literature based on the relationships they hoped to cultivate. The strategies they used to cultivate different types of relationships varied. For example, boys collaboratively read Yu-gi-oh cards, comic books, or choose humorous books – often books that might not be considered funny by adults. Students strategically cultivated relationships with their parents asking them read aloud before bedtime, or, as was the case with Kevin, reading books or

magazines on topics of shared interest. Adolescents, who chose to cultivate relationships with younger students or siblings, allowed the younger students to choose picture books and then read them aloud. If an adolescent hoped to cultivate a relationship with an adult other than his or her parent, the student might read a book recommended to them by the adult. Students might also strategically elect to avoid reading particular texts if reading got in the way of cultivating desired relationships. If students did not wish to display vulnerability or if the reading material was not enjoyable, students would avoid reading while still hoping to cultivate the relationship using other means.

I realize that understanding independent reading as part of a process of cultivating relationships is not unproblematic, or even easy to observe. Cultivating relationships may not be conscious or intentional. For example, adolescents may pick up a book not thinking or planning to talk about the book with someone else. Or, they might imagine talking or learning about a book topic for an interaction with someone they have never met (such as a celebrity or someone they would like to be). Or, they may never talk about literature they have read, particularly if they did not find it compelling. Nevertheless, in this study, I found students who enjoyed reading: 1) discussed books, 2) read in areas of shared interests, 3) read along with friends and family members, and 4) read aloud to younger children and siblings.

Independent Reading and the Social Turn

In an article entitled "The New Literacy Studies and the Social Turn,'" Gee (1999) argues there are currently fourteen intellectual movements, some overlapping, that reject the prevailing approach to studying human nature and behavior through a largely individualistic and biological lens. One of these insurgent movements has been called the "New Literacy Studies." Gee writes,

The New Literacy Studies are based on the view that reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social

and cultural (and we can add historical, political, and economic) practices of which they are but a part. (Gee, 1999: p. 3).

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement has been characterized by ethnographies and theories of how people in various contexts use reading and writing, especially outside of school settings (Heath, 1983; Street 1984, 1995; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Cope & Kalantzsis, 2000). The present study can be seen as part of the NLS movement, which represents a paradigm shift in research on reading and literacy. As mentioned above, the participants in this study did not notice or report social motivations for reading. This is perhaps because viewing reading as a social activity runs counter to current common-sense understandings of why people read. This is true for teachers, parents, and students, but it is also largely true among researchers and theorists outside of the NLS movement. There are those who recognize reading as social, but in other ways. For example, Smith (1998) argued, "reading is not a solitary activity." By this he meant:

Readers are never alone. Readers can join the company of the characters they read about— that is the reason we read stories of people with whom we can identify or of situations in which we would like to be...when we read we can also join the company of authors. We can share ideas and experiences with them, often in considerably more comfort and security than the authors were in when they had their ideas and experiences or wrote their books (Smith 1998, p. 24).

Smith identified compelling reasons for reading, and articulated a commonly held view of reading as "social." However, he did not address the many other ways in which reading is social, such as those found in this study.

In a recent article examining leisure reading activities among adolescents, researchers surveyed seven hundred and fifteen middle school students about their leisure reading habits (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). The survey included a question about possible

motivations for reading, with ten possible responses. Possible responses included "for fun," "for escape," and "I get attached to characters." None of the possible motivations were related to social interactions or cultivating relationships and not surprisingly, the researchers did not report a connection between leisure reading and cultivating social relationships. Seeing "leisure reading" as tied to cultivating relationships runs counter to common understandings about reading, including those held by some researchers.

There are exceptions. Several scholars have specifically identified social aspects of literacy and have connected these to motivation (Short & Pierce, 1990; Hepler & Hickman, 1982; Manning & Manning, 1984; Appleby & Conner, 1965). These studies are consistent with the findings of the present study.

Conclusions

Teaching practices most effective in encouraging students to read must draw upon the powerful motivational impact of social processes for cultivating relationships. As previously mentioned, students who enjoy reading: 1) discuss books, 2) read in areas of interest among family members and friends, 3) read along with friends and family members, and 4) read aloud to others, including younger children and siblings. I will conclude with literacy teaching practices that are supported by this study:

As I mentioned above, one assignment I used in my teaching with considerable success is interactive book journals. Interactive book journals involve dialogue between teachers and students, among students, and could involve larger groups of people using online forums which would allow students to cultivate rich relationships via reading and writing (see http://daemonwolfbooks.livejournal.com/ as an online example).

Second, literature circles (Daniels, 2002) involving book discussions in small groups allow students to engage in social interaction around books. Although much more structured than a typical "book club" among adults, literature circles allow students to explore common interests and share opinions and understanding.

Buddy reading (Gramstorff, 2000) involves students at different ages and abilities reading regularly over extended periods of time, allowing students to develop social relationships focused around literature and reading.

Finally, it is difficult to underestimate the importance of a school or community library that offers a wide selection of books, magazines, electronic media, knowledgeable librarians, and comfortable places to read and perhaps even to talk about books and other literature (Krashen, 2004; Foertsch, 1992; Snow, et al., 1991). Krashen (2004, 2005) and others have argued that a wide variety of literature, including non-fiction, fiction with multicultural characters in urban settings, comic books, and magazines are crucial to encouraging students of all socioeconomic backgrounds to voluntarily read. Libraries and classroom teachers could also learn from bookstores that display books in attractive settings, using props including posters, and artfully arranging books, to encourage perusal.

In this essay I reviewed recent research that suggests habits of independent reading outside of school are strong indicators of school and reading success. I then conducted a study to explore why and how adolescent students choose to read independently or are reluctant to do so. Upon interviewing adolescent students, their parents, and their current teachers about possible motivations for these adolescents to read or not to read and analyzing the data, I found evidence suggesting that independent reading is intimately connected to various social practices despite commonly held views that independent reading is a solitary activity. And there are several teaching techniques that seem to be supported by this analysis.

Possible limitations to this study include the fact that I knew the participants. My unique relationships with the participants as the students' former teacher and the teachers as former colleagues, may have affected

interview responses - perhaps influencing participants to say what they thought I wanted to hear. Another limitation to the study was the small number of participants. More research is needed to examine the ways in which "independent reading" is social, and the ways in which teachers, parents, and students can use this knowledge to create environments where students enjoy reading and develop rich reading habits. The notion of "cultivating relationships" should also be further theorized, as it seems clear that this process requires knowledge and expertise on the part of children. How might adults better understand this basic human activity? How might adults help students become more successful with these endeavors? And how might those adults who want to encourage their students and children to read more, better understand how literacy is related to-- and might be encouraged or facilitated—with a more nuanced understanding of how children cultivate relationships?

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Appendix

In the case of the two teachers interviewed, I sent to them via electronic mail, and before the first full-length interview, a list of questions I was planning to ask, so they could prepare data that may be relevant to the interviews. The questions were:

1.) How do you see (student's name) as a reader?

2.) What do you think motivates (student) to read or not to read?

3.) Tell me about (student) in the classroom.

4.) What particular academic strengths or weaknesses do you see in (student)?

5.) How might his/her academic identity be related to his/her social identity?

6.) What strategies do you think work best with turning kids on to reading at this age?

7.) Are there particular kinds of homework that work best?

8.) How important do you think reading is to school success?

9.) How have your thoughts on these topics changed over time and the course of your career?