

BOOK SELECTIONS OF ECONOMICALLY-DISADVANTAGED AFRICAN  
AMERICAN KINDERGARTENERS

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## ABSTRACT

BETH K. DAWKINS: Book Selections of Economically Disadvantaged African American Kindergarteners

(Under the direction of Dr. Melissa Miller)

The research questions were: In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, do African American kindergarteners select books based on multicultural content; and in comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, how do African American kindergarteners describe book selections they make for themselves, and peers of similar and different races? Participants included 160 kindergarten students from lower-income schools. Picture books representing different cultures were donated to participants' classrooms, and students were allowed to select the book they would most like to read. Students were also interviewed regarding rationales for book selections. Analyses of book selections provided no statistical significance regarding the relationship between race and students' book selections, however over 40% of African American students made culturally-consistent book selections. Analyses of students' interviews presented seven main categories of rationales for book selections, including: Book Elements, Character Elements, Cultural Content, External Influences, Prior Knowledge, Random, and Story Elements. For African American participants, Story Elements represented the most popular rationales for book selections (46%), and Cultural Content represented the second most popular rationales for book selections (18%). Results from the current study suggest that multicultural content may be an influence on students' book selections, but that further investigation is needed to examine the relationship between race and book selections. Results also suggest that while younger readers may be influenced

by multicultural content in books, the most influencing factor on book selections may be the quality of the story- including the storyline, plot, illustrations and theme.

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## CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE, STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, THEORY

### Introduction

“Research has shown that reading ability is positively correlated with the extent to which students read recreationally,” (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). In 1994, nine, thirteen, and seventeen year old students who reported reading for fun at least once a week had higher average reading proficiency scores than students who reported never or hardly ever reading for fun (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Students who read more tend to have better reading abilities and higher reading achievement (Stanovich, 1986), and the current study sought to find more information regarding the reading interests of a population of individuals consistently falling behind in reading achievement- lower income, African American students. Since the 1970’s, National Assessment of Educational Progress scores consistently show African American students lagging behind in reading abilities on an average of 30 percentage points in comparison to Caucasian students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). This national trend is unacceptable. The current study sought to find more information regarding the reading interests of African-American students in hopes of improving reading ability and reading achievement.

### Rationale

African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds represent two populations of students who are consistently scoring below average in reading, in comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers. Studies indicate a correlation between reading achievement and the amount of text a person reads (reading amount) Allington,

2001; Stanovich, 1986), and according to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), individuals who are engaged in reading tend to read more and participate more in voluntary reading. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) also suggest that *interesting texts* are a factor contributing to the event of reading engagement. Providing interesting texts to students may increase reading engagement, increasing reading engagement may increase reading amount, and increasing reading amount may positively influence reading achievement. The current study sought to discover more about reading interests of economically disadvantaged students. Being economically disadvantaged is defined for the study as being from a lower economic background. The current study took place in schools having over 70% of the student population receiving free/reduced lunches. The study does not have information regarding the income level of individual students, however, the student participants were from schools reporting significant levels of students receiving free/reduced lunches. Interviews were administered to 160 economically disadvantaged kindergarteners in order to gather information regarding book selections for themselves and peers of similar/different races. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit information regarding how economically disadvantaged African American kindergarteners select literature to read. It is important that adults responsible for providing literature for young students be informed of their reading interests and book selection patterns so that they may better support reading and literacy for these young readers.

#### Statement of the Problem

Since the 1970's, NAEP scores consistently show African American students lagging behind in reading abilities on an average of 30 percentage points in comparison to Caucasian students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). The NAEP National Report Card

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) also indicates a significant achievement gap in reading between students from lower and higher economic backgrounds. Students who qualify for free lunch, an indicator of lower economic status, are approximately 30 percentage points behind in reading achievement in comparison to students not eligible for free or reduced lunch. These statistics suggest that there is a need for research regarding reading behaviors in African American students, and students from lower economic backgrounds. Currently, no substantial research base exists for educators to examine data patterns in book selection among African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Williams, 2008). It is necessary for researchers to develop such a base so that adults responsible for providing literature to these children can be more informed as to the book selections these children may find interesting, which could encourage more reading and increase reading amount (Williams, 2008). In the current study, I examined the book selections of African American kindergarteners from economically disadvantaged schools in order to discover information that may inform early childhood professionals regarding reading interests of a population of students who typically perform below average on national reading assessments.

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Reading Achievement and Reading Amount*

Reading, both required and recreational, can have positive effects on reading achievement as concluded by both empirical evidence, and the conventional wisdom of the profession (Leinhardt, Zigmond & Cooley, 1981; Taylor, Frye & Maruyama, 1990). Reading amount may be the connection between reading and reading achievement (Allington, 2001; Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988); in other words, the more individuals read and are

exposed to print, the better their reading and literacy skills may become (Stanovich, 1986). The amount of time students engage in reading and reading-related tasks at school is positively correlated with gains in reading achievement (Brophy & Good, 1986; Fisher, Berliner, Filby, Marliave, Cahen & Dishaw, 1980; Greaney, 1980; Stallings & Kaskowitz, 1974). Research also suggests a positive correlation between the amount of time spent reading at home and reading achievement, specifically in elementary age children (Anderson et al., 1988). Heyns (1978) found that reading amount was the only summertime activity that made a significant contribution to reading achievement; and the New York Bureau of School Program Evaluations (1976) reported that the greatest difference between high-performing and low-performing schools regarding reading achievement was the large amounts of silent/independent reading taking place in high-performing schools. The above studies indicate a significant relationship between reading amount and reading achievement.

The Matthew Effect in Reading (Stanovich, 1986) also describes a strong relationship between reading amount and reading achievement, and suggests a reciprocal and/or domino effect regarding reading achievement stemming from reading amount. Increased reading amount and frequent interactions with text can improve reading skills such as vocabulary, comprehension and summarizing (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala & Cox, 1999). Readers with more advanced reading skills tend to read more and read with more ease, in comparison to poorer readers (Connor, 1954; Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen & Campbell, 2001; Greaney, 1980; Himmelweit & Swift, 1976). The Matthew Effect in Reading (Stanovich, 1986) can also function in a downwards spiral regarding reading achievement. Readers with poorer vocabularies, poorer comprehension abilities, and who often struggle with reading, tend to read less and read slower which may impede literacy development and reading

achievement (Stanovich, 1986). The current study sought to discover information about book selection of economically disadvantaged African American kindergarteners with the objective of discovering information that may contribute to these students moving upwards with the Matthew Effect in reading, and overall reading achievement.

The benefits of high reading amounts have been well-documented in the field of early childhood education. Young children who have frequent interactions with literature tend to develop more sophisticated language structures (Chomsky, 1972), have more interest in reading, and often have an easier time with reading in general (Cohen, 1968; Durkin, 1966). As children get older, the amount of time spent reading independently tends to decrease (Maxwell, 1977); however, evidence suggests children with higher reading achievement may maintain their reading amount and prove to be an exception to this trend (Himmelweit, Oppenheim, & Vince, 1958; Schramm, Lyle & Parker, 1961). In sum, increased reading amount has shown to have significant effects in student reading behaviors and reading achievement.

### *Reading Engagement*

The Theoretical Framework of Reading Engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) provided the overarching theoretical framework for the current study, and outlines cognitive, social, and instructional factors which may influence the event of reading engagement. Reading engagement is defined as the joint operation of motivations and strategies for reading, and conceptual knowledge during reading (Guthrie, Anderson, Alao & Rinehart, 1999). Engaged reading has been described as a state of total absorption or flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), and engaged readers often become immersed in what they are reading (Sturm, 2001). Immersion in reading occurs when readers become completely



absorbed or engrossed in a book (Nell, 1988; Sturm, 2001). During engaged reading, literature becomes a page-turner, and the reader is very interested in the outcome of the story (Nell, 1988). Engaged readers often possess a great deal of curiosity about what they are reading, which may fuel a desire to continue reading until completion of the text (Tierney & Shanahan, 1990).

Readers who are engaged in literature often read by choice (Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992), and more often choose to read for pleasure and personal interest (Guthrie, Van Meter, McCann, Wigfield, Bennett, Poundstone, Rice, Faibisch, Hunt & Mitchell, 1996). Engaged readers are motivated to read, are strategic in using multiple approaches to comprehend literature, are knowledgeable in their construction of new understanding from text, and socially interactive in their approach to literacy (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Hidi & Baird, 1988). Readers who are able to engage in literature often find reading a pleasurable, rewarding activity, and view reading as an opportunity to learn, experience and discover. On the contrary, disengaged readers tend to avoid reading activities, view reading as an arduous task, and rarely experience immersion in literature (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Research suggests that engaged readers tend to develop a fondness for reading which spans across time, transfers to a variety of genres, and often culminates in valued learning outcomes and higher reading achievement (Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

In sum, reading engagement is associated with reading achievement (Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000); and highly engaged readers show higher reading achievement than less engaged readers (Campbell, Voelkl & Donahue, 1997). Reading engagement may influence reading amount, and reading amount may be a significant factor influencing reading achievement (Allington, 2001; Anderson et al., 1988).

### *Interesting Texts*

The Theoretical Model of Reading Engagement specifies several classroom/instructional factors contributing to the overall event of reading engagement, making engagement in literacy a true merger of multiple qualities (Cambourne, 1995). Classroom/instructional factors that affect reading engagement include, but are not limited to: learning and knowledge goals, real-world interactions, autonomy support, strategy instruction, collaboration, praise and rewards, evaluation, teacher involvement and perceptions, classroom learning environment, student efficacy, coherence of instructional processes, and interesting texts (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). In the current study, the factor *interesting text*, defined by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) as literary works in which the text matches the topic interest and cognitive competency of the reader, played a key role in the study's theoretical framework. Interest may be a primary factor in book selection (Worthy, 1996), and by conducting a book selection study, I sought to elicit information on how students select books to read and what students may find *interesting* in picture books.

Researchers have attempted to explain the complex affective factor of interest, and factors generating interest in reading materials. Schank (1979), who may have been the first influential researcher to investigate the phenomenon of *interestingness*, outlined three factors arousing interest in reading material: (1) unexpectedness or novelty, (2) certain themes or story concepts, and (3) when readers have to “fill in the blanks” of a story. He suggests that unusual occurrences that deviate from reader expectations, or information having an abnormal nature, may be more interesting to readers. Kintsch (1980) categorizes interest in two domains: cognitive interest and emotional interest. Cognitive interest is produced by the interaction of new information to prior knowledge, and emotional interest is caused by

information or events that emotionally rouse the reader. Schank's and Kintsch's concept of cognitive interest is consistent with Piaget's (1978) idea of adaptation in information processing that states mental structures react to new information by attempting to assimilate the new information into existing knowledge. In short, cognitive interest may be caused by cognitive conflict occurring from the presence of new or novel information. Iran-Nejad (1984) studied interestingness with reading material and also concluded that intellectual activity may create interest. When reading materials have missing, ambiguous or unusual content, intellectual activity occurs as readers enter a cognitive process of resolving the incomplete understanding of text.

Further research supports the idea that new, novel, and unusual content in reading materials may be a significant contributor to readers finding a particular text interesting. Unusual or novel text content tends to result in higher ratings of interest by adults and school-age readers (Hidi, Baird & Hildyard, 1982; Schank, 1979), and suspense or surprising information in reading materials tend to elicit more interest response during reading (Bower, 1982; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981, 1982; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Researchers have also suggested that the combination of both novel and familiar information in text may contribute to reader interest. Kintsch (1980) suggests the interaction of three factors may contribute to cognitive interest: (1) how much one knows about the subject matter, (2) the degree of uncertainty generated by the text, and (3) *postdictability*, which represents how well information in the beginning of a text can be meaningfully related to other/latter sections of the text. Kintsch's (1980) argument is consistent with Berlyne's (1974) idea that interest may not be created by novelty alone, but novelty in interaction with familiar content and previous

experience. These researchers purport cognitive interest may be generated by an appropriate balance of both familiar and novel information in reading materials.

The current study focused on *text-based interest*, which results from the interaction of textual features and the individual reading the text (Hidi & Baird, 1988). Four factors may contribute to text-based interest: novelty, character identification, life themes and activity level of the text (Anderson, Shirey, Wilson, & Fielding, 1984). Numerous researchers have suggested certain themes are universally interesting to human beings. Concepts such as death, danger, power, sex, tragedy and mystery tend to be absolute interests or generally important topics to readers (Freebody & Anderson, 1981; Schank, 1979; Wilensky, 1983); and may elicit interest response due to personal relatedness or unexpectedness. Berlyne (1971) and Hidi & Baird (1988) outlined two similar factors contributing to text-based interest: (1) novel, surprising or unexpected events, and (2) universally-interesting concepts or themes. These researchers go further to suggest interest should be investigated by focusing on two variables: text-based interest and the impact of personal preferences on cognitive performance. In sum, the characteristics of novelty-familiarity, and universally-interesting concepts and themes have been consistently found as contributors to readers finding interest in reading materials.

Interesting content in reading material is often rated as more important by readers than non-interesting content (McLloyd, 1979; Walker & Kintsch, 1981), and interesting stories are more likely to be rated as good stories (Brewer & Lichtenstein 1981, 1982). Research indicates positive effects resulting when individuals read interesting texts. Interest may have a positive influence on story recall (Anderson, 1982; Anderson, Mason & Shirey, 1984; Hidi & McLaren, 1988; Knecht, 1983), may improve story comprehension (Asher,

Hymel & Wigfield, 1978; Estes & Vaughan, 1973; Fader & McNeil, 1968), and may increase desire and motivation to read (Asher, 1979; Asher & Geraci, 1980; Hidi & Baird, 1986; Stein, 1983). Readers tend to devote more time, effort and persistence in reading interesting content (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; McLoyd, 1979), and may learn more from interesting content versus non-interesting content (Anderson, 1982; Hidi & Baird, 1986; Schiefele, 1996;). Interest in reading can often mediate reading level (Hunt, 1971,) and may have a positive influence on overall reading achievement (Cook & White, 1977; Gormli & Nittoli, 1970).

### *Reading Interests and Book Selections*

Children's book selections may provide insight into what aspects of picture books children find interesting. Currently, an abundance of evidence exists outlining children's reading interests based on gender (Feeley, 1972, 1982; Mohr, 2003; Wolfson, Manning & Manning, 1984); genre (Chui, 1984; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Robinson, Larsen, Haupt, Mohiman, 1997); the influence of others including peers, teachers, and family members (Fleener, Morrison, Linek & Rasinski, 1997; Morrow, 1987; Palmer, Colding & Gambrell, 1994); familiar-novel content (Kintsch, 1980; Schank, 1979); and physical book characteristics (Nodelman, 1988; Wexner, 1954). The above influences are discussed further in the following chapter. Less research exists regarding how children's literature interests are influenced by *multicultural representation* in picture books (Brooks & McNair, 2009; Laumbach, 1995; Mohr, 2003; Williams, 2008), and the current book selection study sought to elicit more information on reading interests of younger readers' based on multicultural representation as indicated by children's book selections and follow-up interviews explaining book selections.

## Multicultural Representation in Literature

Multicultural literature is literature containing themes, characters and illustrations that depict a variety of cultures (Brooks, 2006; Steffensen, Joag-Dev & Anderson, 1979; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992). Multicultural literature can significantly benefit the children who read and are exposed to it (Hittleman, 1978; Holmes, Powell, Holmes & Witt, 2007). Books containing multicultural content can have a positive impact on the self-image and self-esteem of African American children (Grice & Vaughn, 1992; Hittleman, 1978; Lehr & Thompson, 2000; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992). Seeing oneself and one's culture positively reflected in a book may bring a sense of value and worth regarding one's culture, and can allow an individual, especially a younger individual, to have pride in themselves and their culture (Bishop, 1990; Brooks & McNair, 2009), and to "walk tall in the world" (Bishop, 1990). Numerous studies suggest literature containing themes, illustrations and content culturally-relevant to African Americans can have positive literary effects on African American students (Banks & Banks, 2001; Boyd, 2002, 2006; Copenhaver, 2001; Ferdman, 1990; Harris, 1995; Lee, 1993; 2006; Sipe & Daley, 2005). African American students tend to experience more enjoyment (Bleich, 1992; Desai, 1997) and more engagement (Alteri, 1995; Hefflin, 2003; Parker, 2008; Sims, 1983; Smith, 1995; Spears-Bunton, 1990) with books containing culturally-relevant content.

Numerous studies suggest reading skills such as comprehension, story recall, and story interpretation may be significantly enhanced when a book's content matches the reader's culture (Bell & Clarke, 1998; Copenhaver, 2001; Harris, 1995; Rickford, 1999; Sipe, 1999). Many researchers have put forward that African American readers may respond better to multicultural books (Hopson & Hopson, 1993; Katz, 1983; Radencich, 1985; Ramsey,

1987; Rudman, 1984); however, this idea is currently unsupported by conclusive scientific evidence (Mohr, 2003; Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2001). In the current study, I endeavored to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the influence of multicultural representation in picture books on younger African American readers by examining how book selections of African American kindergarteners may be affected by multicultural content in books.

The current study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, how do African American kindergarteners describe book selections they make for themselves, and peers of similar/different races?
2. In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, do African American kindergarteners select books based on multicultural content?

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The current study was informed by: (1) the theory of reading engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), (2) research on interesting texts, (3) prior studies conducted with younger readers investigating book selections and reading interests, and (4) research on multicultural children's literature. The theory of reading engagement was used to understand the importance of interesting texts. Prior studies examining book selection patterns in elementary-age readers provided information regarding reading interests of younger readers. And finally, research regarding the significance of multicultural children's literature was used to understand the importance of examining the reading interests of African American readers.

### Theory of Reading Engagement

The theory of reading engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) provided the overarching theoretical framework for the current study, and outlines cognitive, social, and instructional factors which may influence the event of reading engagement. Reading engagement is defined as the joint operation of motivations and strategies for reading, and conceptual knowledge during reading (Guthrie, et al., 1999). Reading engagement is essential for readers as engaged readers often develop a devotion to reading which spans across time, transfers to a variety of genres, and often culminates in valued learning outcomes and higher reading achievement (Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992; Guthrie &



Wigfield, 2000). Reading engagement is associated with reading achievement (Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), and highly engaged readers often show higher reading achievement than less engaged readers (Campbell, et al., 1997). Reading engagement may influence reading amount, and reading amount may be a significant factor regarding reading achievement (Allington, 2001; Anderson, et al., 1988). The current study focused on a specific component of reading engagement, *interesting texts*.

### Research on Interesting Texts

The theory of reading engagement specifies several classroom/instructional factors contributing to the overall event of reading engagement. These factors include, but are not limited to: learning and knowledge goals, real-world interactions, autonomy support, strategy instruction, collaboration, praise and rewards, evaluation, teacher involvement and perceptions, classroom learning environment, student efficacy, coherence of instructional processes, and interesting texts (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The current study focused on the factor *interesting texts*, defined by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) as literary works in which the text matches the topic interest and cognitive competency of the reader. Interest may be a primary factor in book selection (Worthy, 1996), and by conducting a book selection study with African American kindergarteners, I sought to elicit information regarding how these readers select picture books, and what they may find *interesting* in picture books.

Currently, a great deal of research documents how reading interests of elementary-age readers may be influenced by: gender preferences, literature genre, novel/familiar book content, the influence of others, and physical book characteristics. Less research, however, is available documenting how reading interests of elementary-age readers are associated with multicultural content in books (Brooks & McNair, 2009; Laumbach, 1995; Mohr, 2003;

Williams, 2008). Being that our society and school systems are reflective of vast racial diversity (United States Census Bureau, 2000), it is imperative that researchers go further in examining how reading interest and book selections of elementary-age readers may be associated with multicultural content in story themes, characters and illustrations in picture books. In the following section, I discuss the influence of gender, literature genre, novel/familiar book content, other individuals, and physical book characteristics on reading interest and book selections of elementary-age readers.

### Influences on Book Selections of Elementary-Age Readers

#### *Reading Interests Based on Gender*

Numerous studies investigating reading interests of elementary-age readers have documented interest based upon the reader's gender. Boys tend to select books featuring themes such as sports, adventure, science, and transportation (Fairleigh, Evard & McDaniel, 1974; Henry, 1992; Simpson, 1996), while girls are inclined towards themes such as family, friendship, fantasy, and emotions (Chick & Heilman-Houser, 2000; Childress, 1985; Kropp & Halverson, 1983). Boys tend to prefer nonfiction literature, whereas girls more frequently select fiction literature to read (Doiron, 2003; Henry, 1992; Simpson, 1996; Wiberg & Trost, 1970). Both genders tend to prefer stories involving animals, or featuring animals as characters over stories involving human beings (Sturm, 2006). Elementary-aged readers have also shown preferences for books featuring same-gender protagonists (Johnson, Peer & Baldwin, 1984; Lowther & Sullivan, 1993).

Gender differences evident in reading interests and book selections of Caucasian and Latino elementary-age readers also reflect reading interests and book selections of economically disadvantaged African American readers (Mohr, 2006; Williams, 2008). Mohr

(2006) conducted a book selection study using nearly 200 first-graders of various racial groups, languages and socioeconomic levels. Participants were offered nine books representing racial and linguistic diversity, and were instructed to select one book to keep as their own. Afterwards, students were interviewed in order to elicit rationales for their book selections. Findings indicated significant preferences based on the reader's gender; and preferences for non-fiction books and books featuring animals. Students frequently selected books based on book topic and illustrations; and findings showed no significant preferences for books reflecting students' race. Mohr (2006) concluded that the book selection patterns of the African American participants were very similar to book selection patterns of the Caucasian and Latino research participants. Williams (2008) conducted a book selection study with approximately 300 African American elementary students from a low socioeconomic background. Participants, ages 8-10, attended a book fair and were wired to microphones for the purpose of recording conversations and commentary made during book selections. Students were instructed to select 15 books to keep as their own, and were subsequently interviewed to elicit further information and rationales regarding the books they selected. Findings indicated significant gender differences in book selections, and significant influences on book selections based on the mass media (or pop culture) and other individuals (i.e. teachers, peers). Williams (2008) found no significant preferences for books reflecting students' race. These two landmark studies offer credible information regarding book selections of African American readers; and the current study continues the effort to find more information regarding reading interests of younger African American readers.

### *Reading Interests Based on Genre*

Research indicates elementary-age readers are inclined towards certain literature genres more so than others. Elementary-age readers often prefer fiction over nonfiction literature (Doiron, 2003; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Henry, 1992; Simpson, 1996; Wiberg & Trost, 1970; Zimet & Camp, 1974); however, conflicting studies present evidence suggesting younger readers may prefer nonfiction over fiction literature (Mohr, 2003; 2006). As stated above, nonfiction literature tends to attract young male readers, and fiction literature tends to attract young female readers (Doiron, 2003; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Henry, 1992; Simpson, 1996; Wiberg & Trost, 1970). Harkrader and Moore (1997) conducted a book selection study with approximately 400 randomly-selected fourth-graders using a survey of fictitious annotated book titles. Findings indicated an overall preference for fiction books, but that boys more often selected non-fiction books and girls more often selected fiction literature. Findings also indicated a preference for same-gender protagonists. No information was found regarding book selection patterns based on multicultural content in books.

Younger readers tend to prefer “stories” or narrative literature in comparison to informational texts (Hall & Cole, 1999; Moss & McDonald, 2004); and some studies indicate a preference for folk/ fairy tales, and stories involving fantasy (Anderson, Higgins & Wurster, 1985; Castaneda, 1995; Purves & Beaches, 1972; Robinson et al., 1997). Robinson, Larsen, Haupt and Mohiman’s (1997) book selection study was conducted with approximately 100 students ages four to six; all participants were Caucasian, from two-parent homes, and were from lower-to-middle socioeconomic backgrounds. Forty books were placed in participants’ classrooms, and students selected a book daily to take home to read with their parents. Students were also observed during classroom activities so that

researchers could view book selection procedures. Findings indicated students' book selections and reselections were based on genre, familiarity, the influence of other individuals, and the reading level of the book. Researchers also noted that students were extremely enthusiastic about taking books home daily to read. The described book selection study provides important information regarding reading interests and book selection of elementary-age students, however, the sample contained no racial diversity, and no information was found regarding how book selections may be influenced by multicultural content. The current study utilized a racially-diverse sample of students, and sought to elicit information specifically on how multicultural representation in books may be associated with students' book selections.

#### *Reading Interests Based on Novel/ Familiar Book Content*

Research suggests that novel book content can influence readers' interest in books and reading. Schank (1979) investigated the variable of *interestingness* in reading materials, and found that unexpectedness or novelty in books aroused interest in reading. Unusual occurrences that deviate from reader expectations, or information having an abnormal nature, tend to be more interesting to readers. For example, a story about an octopus living on a farm may be more interesting to a reader in comparison to a story about a cow living on a farm since an octopus living on a farm is unusual in our society (Nodelman, 1988). Iran-Nejad (1984) also studied interestingness with reading material and concluded that intellectual activity stemming from new or novel content may create interest. When reading materials have missing, ambiguous or unusual content, intellectual activity occurs as readers enter a cognitive process of resolving the incomplete understanding of text. Unusual or novel text content tends to result in higher ratings of interest by school-age readers, as well as adult

readers (Hidi et al., 1982; Schank, 1979); and suspense or surprising information in reading materials also tends to elicit a more intense “interest response” from both adult and school-age readers (Bower, 1982; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981, 1982; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

While novel content in books may influence reader interest, research indicates that the presence of *both* novel and familiar information in books can influence reader interest. Kintsch (1980) researched cognitive and emotional interest in reading, and concluded that cognitive interest is produced by the interaction of new or novel information and prior knowledge. He also suggests the interaction of three factors may contribute to cognitive interest: (1) how much one knows about the subject matter, (2) the degree of uncertainty generated by the text, and (3) *postdictability*, which represents how well information in the beginning of a text can be meaningfully related to other/latter sections of the text. Kintsch’s (1980) argument is consistent with Berlyne’s (1974) conclusion that interest may not be created by novelty alone, but novelty in interaction with familiar content and prior knowledge. Both researchers assert reading interest may be generated by an *appropriate* balance of both familiar and novel information in literature.

Theories of early childhood cognitive development support the idea that information processing and thinking are associated with the interaction of novel information and prior knowledge. Piaget (1978) references familiar and novel content in his writings on early childhood cognitive development, and explains that a key component of early cognition is adaptation. Adaptation takes place in two complementary processes, which are assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the tendency of organisms to understand new information by fitting it into existing knowledge, and accommodation is the corresponding process of organisms adjusting existing mental structures in order to house new information

and proceed with learning new information. In sum, Piaget suggests early cognition is based upon the continual interaction of new information and prior knowledge. Vygotsky (1984) also suggests cognitive activity in young children is associated with new information interacting with existing information. External stimuli are mediated by social influences such as peers, adults or language enabling young children to make sense of and incorporate new information into existing mental structures (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). This process of internalization (Meadows, 1993) continues a consistent process of scaffolding, or increasing one's mental capacity by building new information upon existing knowledge. According to the above stated ideas regarding early cognition and thinking, it is logical to assume that elementary-age readers may find interest in picture books based on the presence of familiar and new information, ideas or illustrations.

#### *Reading Interests Based on the Influence of Others*

Numerous studies investigating reading interests of elementary-age readers have documented the pivotal role that other individuals may have on book selections of younger readers. Family members, friends and peers play a key role in recommending books to young readers (Carter, 1988; Casteneda, 1995; Fleener et al., 1997; Henry, 1992; Jenkins, 1955; Kragler, 2000; Timion, 1992; Wendelin & Zinck, 1988). Reading interest and reading motivation can be significantly affected by the influence of teachers, peers, family members, and particularly mothers; students often select and read books they would not otherwise encounter based on recommendations or actual selections of these individuals (Mohr, 2006; Wendelin & Zinck, 1988). Some studies conclude peers and family members are more influential on students' book selections in comparison to teachers (Mohr, 2006; Wendelin & Zinck, 1988), while other studies suggest teacher influences weigh heavier on student book

selections (Doiron, 2003; Fisher, 1988; Kragler, 2000). Teachers may be more influential on student book selections through access and availability of books in classrooms (Fleener et al., 1997; Morrow, 1987), and through classroom read-alouds (Doiron, 2003; Simpson, 1996). Martinez, Roser, Worthy, Strecker, and Gough (1997) and Castaneda (1995) suggest young readers from low income backgrounds more often select books based on teacher influence.

The influence of other individuals has been well-documented in book selection studies featuring elementary-age readers as participants. Fleener, Morrison, Linek and Rasinski (1997) conducted a book selection study with approximately 30, fifth and sixth graders of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Students kept logs of books selected for independent reading and were interviewed regarding book selection habits. Researchers also observed students' book selection habits during school library visits. Findings indicated book selections are often based upon recommendations by others, physical book features, and literature genre. Greaney (1999) conducted a book selection study with students in grades three through eight to discover more information regarding influences on students' book choices. A survey listing 10 likely influences on book selection was administered to students; findings indicated book selection is most strongly influenced by book topic, book genre, familiarity due to author or book series, and recommendations by others. Both studies offer valuable information towards book selection behaviors of older elementary readers, and the current study sought to discover book selection behaviors of younger elementary readers, specifically kindergarteners ages four to six.

The influence other individuals have on students' reading interests is often considered a *social influence*, and social influences can significantly impact book selections of younger readers (Reutzel & Gali, 1998). Examples of social influences are: adults' book selections for



shared reading activities, and adults' behaviors during reading activities such as reading with *voices*, emphasizing pictures, and encouraging reader interaction. These social influences can have a significant influence on student book selection and reselection (Heath, 1982; Morrison, Fleener, Linek & Rasinski, 1997; Morrow, 1988; Palmer et al., 1994; Teale & Sulzby, 1987). The idea that social influences significantly impact young readers is consistent with Vygotsky's (1987) conclusions regarding early childhood cognitive development which suggests that young children's direction of attention and cognitive activity are significantly influenced by social mediators such as language, peers or adults (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

#### *Reading Interests Based on Physical Book Characteristics*

Physical book characteristics such as the title, illustrations, cover illustrations, size and thickness can influence readers, and attract or dissuade readers from selecting a particular book to read (Fleener et al., 1997; Greenlaw & Wielan, 1979; Lawson, 1972; Mohr, 2003; Peterson, 1971; Stewig, 1972). Younger readers often select books based upon the cover (Nodelman, 1988; Wexner, 1954), and children's book authors/illustrators frequently use vivid, colorful cover and book illustrations designed to attract readers' interest (Au, Kunitake & Blake, 1992; Hoffman, Roser & Battle, 1993; Holmes et al., 2007). Increased reader interest based on physical book characteristics may be caused by affective, as opposed to cognitive, features of a book; pleasing illustrations or a particularly interesting choice of words may increase enjoyment of reading more so than learning (Holmes, et al., 2007). Analyses of text features of frequently- selected student books reveal the following predominant features: large print, complete meaning on a one- or two-page spread, familiar and age-appropriate vocabulary, cover illustration and vivid illustrations (King, 1967;

Lysaker, 1997; Nodelman, 1988; Peterson, 1991; Reutzel & Gali, 1998). In Lysaker's (1997) book selection study with six Caucasian six-year olds from lower to middle socioeconomic backgrounds, researchers observed and recorded students' book choices during independent reading activities, engaged in conversations with students regarding book choices, and kept running records documenting students' book choices. Findings indicated that physical book characteristics, personal interest, social connections and reading ability significantly influence book selections. The described study, however, has several limitations; the sample size is very small, and all participants were Caucasian. It is important that researchers exert effort to discover more about book selection behaviors of a wider variety of students, and the current study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding book selection behaviors of economically-disadvantaged African American kindergarteners.

Physical book characteristics can impact reader expectations and influence a reader's *envisionment* of a particular book (Langer, 1990). Envisionment is a reader's initial impression of a book and a reader's prediction of the events that will take place in a book (Langer, 1990). Most readers, especially younger readers, form opinions about a reading experience prior to opening the book, reading the words, or viewing the pictures (Huck & Kiefer, 2004; Nodelman, 1988). For example, cover illustrations can create a mood and influence what readers expect the book to contain, just as the size of a book can signify certain expectations (Huck & Kiefer, 2004; Nodelman, 1988). Very small or large books are generally expected to be for younger readers, and often contain simple vocabulary appropriate for pre-readers; whereas thick books or books without cover illustrations are generally expected to contain content for older readers (Nodelman, 1988). Reader expectations of books prior to reading may influence reader interest, and possibly book selection and reselection (Galda, Ash &

Cullinan, 2001). Hiebert, Mervar and Person (1990) also suggest that physical book characteristics, specifically illustrations, significantly impact book selection of elementary-age readers. In the study, second graders were observed during library visits, were allowed to select one book to read from a set of five books, and were interviewed to elicit rationales for book selections. Findings indicated illustrations heavily impact book selection, in addition to book genre, novel and familiar content, and topic interest. The current study sought to elicit information regarding how book selection may be associated specifically with multicultural content, in addition to the above stated, widely-researched factors.

### Book Selections of Kindergarten Students

Currently, minimal information exists regarding book selections of kindergarten-age students. Prior research suggests that book interests emerge in readers around the age of eight or nine (Haynes, 1988; Haynes & Richgels, 1992; Sturm, 2006), and that individuals younger than age eight show little consistency in reading preferences or discrimination with book content (Beta Upsilon Chapter of Pi Lambda Theta, 1974; Chui, 1973). Beliefs similar to these may be one reason for the lack of book selection studies featuring younger readers as participants, and for the dearth of knowledge regarding reading interests and book selection of younger readers. However, two studies indicate that book interests may actually evolve earlier than prior research has indicated (Childress, 1985; Robinson et al., 1997).

Robinson, Larsen, Haupt and Mohiman (1997) conducted a study with 53 students ages four to five, and 49 students ages five to six (total of 102 participants), of lower to middle socioeconomic status in order to discover more information regarding influences on book selection. Students were allowed to select a picture book from a set of 40 books, and teachers recorded students' book selections. Parents were given surveys to assess their

child's familiarity with each book title, and researchers observed students in classrooms to view book selection behaviors. Findings indicated students' book selections and reselections were based on genre, familiarity, the influence of other individuals, and the reading level of the book. Researchers also noted that students were extremely enthusiastic about taking books home daily to read. Based on the above described study, kindergarten students may be able to select books based on reading interests and book preferences. Childress (1985) discovered through observing kindergarten and first-grade students in the school library, that book preferences, especially according to gender, were clearly evident. In short, it is possible that kindergarten students may possess book preferences and reading interests.

In sum, there are minimal studies investigating book selection behaviors of kindergarten students. The current study featured kindergarten students, ages four to six, as participants since less was known about their reading interests, and since this information could assist parents and practitioners as they foster reading interest among students entrusted to their care (Robinson et al., 1997).

#### Multicultural Literature/ Multicultural Content in Children's Literature

Multicultural literature is literature containing themes, characters and illustrations that depict a variety of cultures (Brooks, 2006; Steffensen et al., 1979; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992). Multicultural literature can represent all "minority" groups, for example: females, non-Caucasian individuals, or individuals with special needs (Banks, 1994; Lehr & Thompson, 2000). For the current study, I focused on African American students.

Multicultural literature can benefit the children who read and are exposed to it (Hittleman, 1978; Holmes et al., 2007). Books containing multicultural content can have a positive impact on the self-image and self-esteem of African American children (Grice &

Vaughn, 1992; Hittleman, 1978; Lehr & Thompson, 2000; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992). Seeing oneself and one's culture positively reflected in a book may bring a sense of value and worth regarding one's culture, and can allow an individual, especially a younger individual, to have pride in themselves and their culture (Bishop, 1990; Brooks & McNair, 2009), and to "walk tall in the world" (Bishop, 1990). Multicultural literature can be beneficial to all children (Hittleman, 1978; Holmes et al., 2007; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992), and can serve as a *window* or *mirror* to a particular culture (Bishop, 1990; Hopson & Hopson, 1993; Katz, 1983; Mohr, 2006; Ramsey, 1987; Rudman, 1984). For children reading a book depicting their own culture, a multicultural book can serve as a mirror, allowing them to see themselves and their culture reflected in a book; and for children reading a book depicting a culture different from their own, a multicultural book can serve as a window and provide a literary experience with another culture (Bishop, 1990; Galda, 1998; Hittleman, 1978; Sipe, 1999). The use of multicultural literature can extend the knowledge base of all individuals regarding different cultures, and can offer information regarding similarities, as well as differences among various culture groups (Litcher & Johnson, 1973; Norton, 1985).

Numerous studies suggest literature containing themes, illustrations and content culturally-relevant to African Americans can have positive literary effects on African American students (Banks & Banks, 2001; Boyd, 2002, 2006; Copenhaver, 2001; Ferdman, 1990; Harris, 1995; Lee, 1993; 2006; Sipe & Daley, 2005). African American students tend to experience more enjoyment (Bleich, 1992; Desai, 1997) and more engagement (Alteri, 1995; Hefflin, 2003; Parker, 2008; Sims, 1983; Smith, 1995; Spears-Bunton, 1990) with books containing culturally-relevant content. African American students reading literature containing African American content may more strongly identify with the story and

characters (Bishop, 1990; Bleich, 1992; Brooks & McNair, 2009; Desai, 1997), and have a greater appreciation for the book and reading experience (Alteri, 1995; Hefflin, 2003; Sims, 1983). African American readers who previously were reluctant to engage in reading activities may gain enthusiasm for reading when presented with texts containing African American content (Parker, 2008).

Numerous studies suggest reading skills such as comprehension, story recall, and story interpretation are significantly enhanced when a book's content matches the reader's culture (Bell & Clarke, 1998; Copenhaver, 2001; Harris, 1995; Rickford, 1999; Sipe, 1999). A possible explanation for enhanced reading skills in African American students when reading books containing African American content is heightened interest in the reading material, and heightened reading motivation (Asher & Markell, 1974; Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld & York, 1966; Singer, Gerard & Redfearn, 1975). The increased *interestingness* of a book due to culturally-relevant content may heighten a student's motivation to read (Asher, 1979; Asher & Markell, 1974); and reading interest may be enhanced by readers having prior knowledge regarding a book's topics (Asher, 1980; Asher et al., 1978). Multicultural books may have a positive effect on African American parents as well as African American children (Brooks & McNair, 2009). In a study examining 10 African American families who were given an abundance of books containing African American content, parents increased the amount of time spent reading aloud to their children, developed a stronger appreciation for high-quality literature, and passed along knowledge gained concerning African American children's books to friends, family members and co-workers (McNair, 2007).

Quality multicultural books not only contain cultural content, but have quality stories and quality illustrations (Boyd, 2002, 2006; Copenhaver, 2001; Harris, 1995; Lee, 1993; 2006; Sipe & Daley, 2005). While African American readers may prefer books with African American content, they also enjoy well-written books with “happy” or pleasurable content (Grice & Vaughan, 1992). In picture books, multicultural illustrations can be just as important as multicultural story content (Johnson, 1990; Roethler, 1998; Thompson, 2001), seeing that young readers tend to rely heavily on illustrations for meaning in picture books (Nodelman, 1988; Sturm, 2001).

Many researchers put forward that African American readers may respond better to multicultural books (Hopson & Hopson, 1993; Katz, 1983; Radencich, 1985; Ramsey, 1987; Rudman, 1984); however, this idea is currently unsupported by conclusive scientific evidence (Mohr, 2003; Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2001). In the current study, I endeavored to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the influence of multicultural representation in picture books on African American readers by examining how book selections of African American kindergarteners may be affected by multicultural content in books.

### Reading Interests of African American Readers

Minimal knowledge exists documenting reading interests of young African American readers specifically (Brooks & McNair, 2009); and African Americans are *highly* underrepresented in book selection studies (Williams, 2008). Two studies assert that no significant differences exist with respect to reading interests of African American and Caucasian readers (Asher, 1979; Holmes et al., 2007). Asher (1979) examined African American and Caucasian fifth grade students to evaluate students’ comprehension of low-

and high-interest reading materials. Both groups of students comprehended more high-interest material than low-interest material. Findings also documented no significant interaction of race and interest, and suggested that African American and Caucasian children have similar interests regarding reading materials. Asher (1979) goes as far as to caution adults against overestimating the distinctiveness of African American children's [reading] interests.

Holmes, Powell, Holmes & Witt (2007) set out to discover the effect of the race of a book's primary characters on the reading motivation of approximately 30, African American and Caucasian third graders of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. After book selections and classroom observations were completed, the data did not support such a conclusion; instead, data suggested that students frequently chose books with characters of a different race than their own. The study's results are similar to the idea that multicultural literature may serve as a *window* or *mirror* to a particular culture (Bishop, 1990; Hopson & Hopson, 1993; Katz, 1983; Mohr, 2006; Ramsey, 1987; Rudman, 1984); that a book depicting a culture different from the reader can provide a literary experience with another culture (Bishop, 1990; Galda, 1998; Hittleman, 1978; Sipe, 1999); and that the use of multicultural literature can extend the knowledge base of all individuals regarding different cultures (Litcher & Johnson, 1973; Norton, 1985). One possible limitation of the study by Holmes et al. (2007) is that students were not interviewed regarding rationales for book selection, or regarding thoughts and perceptions on books read during the study. Perhaps engaging in conversations with students would have uncovered more and possibly conflicting information regarding reading interests and motivation based on the race of a book's characters. The current study employed the



strategy of student interviews, in addition to book selection, in order to elicit qualitative data explaining thoughts, perceptions and interests regarding multicultural literature.

Currently, two book selection studies offer meaningful information regarding book selections and reading interests of African American readers. Campbell, Griswold, and Smith (1988) examined the effects of book covers on reading choices of elementary students, and approximately one-third of the research participants were African American. Results showed African Americans selected more hardback versions of books in comparison to their Caucasian peers. Zimet and Camp (1974) compared book selection patterns of African American readers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds with those of Caucasian, economically *advantaged* readers (Wiberg & Trost, 1970). Both groups of participants more frequently selected fiction than nonfiction books; more frequently selected books that included “help” as the outcome of the story; and more frequently selected books that included “boy” activities and make-believe themes. African American participants more often selected books with Caucasian characters, and books with more than one “agent of help.”

A key influence on reading interest among African American readers may be character identification (Galda et al., 2001), which can influence the extent to which a reader is able to engage in a book (Hilgard, 1974; Langer, 1990). Character identification can be influenced by factors such as race, gender, physical description or economic status of characters (Brooks & McNair, 2009; Huck & Kiefer, 2004). Readers who can identify with story characters feel they could replace the story characters, and often experience a gratifying “mental journey” through the book’s event (Langer, 1990; Sturm, 2001). As race may affect character identification, and character identification may affect reader interest, it is logical to

assume that individuals reading books featuring characters from similar racial/cultural backgrounds may experience heightened interest in the respective book, and may have a more meaningful reading experience with the respective book.

In sum, minimal research exists documenting how book selections and reading interests of African American elementary-age readers are influenced by multicultural content of books (Brooks & McNair, 2009; Laumbach, 1995; Mohr, 2003; Williams, 2008). Being that our society and schools are reflective of vast cultural diversity (United States Census Bureau, 2000), it is imperative that researchers go further in examining how children's book selections are associated with multicultural content in story themes, characters and illustrations in children's books. The current study addressed the pressing need for more inquiry in this area of research by examining book selections of African American kindergarteners.

#### Readers from Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Some research exists concerning book selection behaviors and reading interests of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, however more research is needed in this area. Martinez, Roser, Worthy, Strecker, and Gough (1997) examined second grade struggling readers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; the majority of participants were Latino. Students' classroom book selections were monitored and recorded; findings indicated students' book selections were heavily influenced by teacher influence and teachers' choices for reading activities. Findings also indicated that the availability, access, and reading level of books influenced students' book selections. Williams' (2008) book selection study utilized all African American students, ages eight to 10, from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Participants were connected to microphones during book

selection at a book fair, and were also interviewed to gather rationales regarding book selection. Study results documented no conclusive preferences for books reflecting students' race; findings also indicated that the mass media, gender, and other individuals have an influence on students' book selections. The current study took place with students from economically disadvantaged schools, and adds to the body of knowledge regarding book selections and reading interests of students from lower economic backgrounds.

Two book selection studies included participants from a mixture of both middle and lower economic backgrounds. Robinson, Larsen, Haupt and Mohiman (1997) conducted a study with four to six year old students from lower to middle socioeconomic backgrounds and found no significant differences among book selections of participants from low and middle socioeconomic backgrounds. Instead, book selections were influenced by genre, familiarity and the reading level of the book. Lysaker (1997) also conducted a book selection study with six Caucasian six-year olds from lower to middle economic backgrounds. Findings did not indicate a significant difference in book preferences according to the economic status of the student; findings did indicate preferences based on value placed on reading, physical book characteristics, personal interest, and reading ability.

In sum, there is a need for more inquiry regarding book selection patterns and reading interests among readers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The current study was conducted with economically disadvantaged students, and sought to make a meaningful contribution to the body of knowledge regarding reading interests and book selections of younger readers from lower economic backgrounds.

## Conclusion

In the above literature review, I outlined information based on the research questions guiding the current study. Ample information is available regarding how book selections and reading interests of elementary-age readers are associated with the reader's gender, literature genre, novel/familiar book content, the influence of others, and physical book characteristics. Currently, multicultural representation in books remains a minimally researched influence on book selection; and in the current study, I focused on the influence of multicultural content on book selection, as it may be a vital, yet scantily researched explanation for book selections and reading interest of African American kindergarteners.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Ample research indicates that book selections and reading interests of elementary-age readers are associated with the reader's gender, literature genre, novel/familiar book content, the influence of others, and physical book characteristics. Currently, minimal research documents how multicultural content in picture books is associated with book selections and reading interests of elementary-age readers. The current study focused on how multicultural content in books may influence book selections and reading interests of economically-disadvantaged African American kindergarteners, in comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers. The current study addressed the following research questions:

1. In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, how do African American kindergarteners describe book selections they make for themselves, and peers of similar/different races?
2. In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, do African American kindergarteners select books based on multicultural content?

### Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were used for the current study:

- Null Hypothesis 1      African American kindergarteners will not select picture books for themselves based on multicultural content.
- Null Hypothesis 2      African American kindergarteners will not select books for peers of similar/different races based on multicultural content.

## Setting

The study took place in elementary schools in the Rutherford County School System, located in the foothills of North Carolina. Rutherford County Schools provided a diverse population of students, including African American and Latino students. Rutherford County Schools also provided schools with high numbers of students receiving free/reduced lunches. According to the 2009 demographic data for Rutherford County Schools, all elementary schools that participated in the study had over 70 percent of students receiving free/reduced lunches. The study took place in nine kindergarten classrooms across three elementary schools. The schools were selected using purposeful sampling procedures (Kuzel, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify schools that would provide an adequate number of African American, Caucasian and Latino student participants. The schools were also selected using purposeful sampling procedures to identify schools with high populations of students receiving free or reduced lunch, which is an indicator of lower economic status.

## Student Participants

Participants were 160 kindergarten students, ages four to six, from the Rutherford County School System (Table 4.1). The study's sample focused on African American, Caucasian and Latino kindergarteners; however the sample also included Bi-racial and Native American participants. Participation in the study was voluntary, and parental consent forms (Appendix A) were required from each participant prior to data collection. Oral consent (Appendix B) was also elicited from each participant prior to data collection. After consent forms were returned, and prior to each interview, I received oral consent from each participant. I read the Oral Consent script (Appendix B) to each participant, and when the participant agreed to be interviewed, I proceeded with the interview. When conducting

research with young children, a population that can be vulnerable, easily manipulated, or easily mistreated, it is important to maintain ethical practices at all times (Hatch, 2007). Ethical practices include obtaining prior consent from all research participants for all activities to be conducted during the inquiry (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006), treating each child with respect and dignity (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996), and honestly reporting all data (Lincoln, 1985).

#### Prior to Data Collection

##### *Recruitment Plan*

After the current study was approved by the dissertation committee, and Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was attained, I submitted a research proposal to the Assistant Superintendent of Rutherford County Schools, Dr. Janet Mason, seeking permission to conduct dissertation research in the county's elementary schools. After approval was granted, I worked with the Elementary Curriculum Instructor for Rutherford County Schools, Steve Helton, to identify schools that would be appropriate to participate in the study based on current demographic and socio-economic data. After schools were identified, I recruited the principals to participate with the study. I wrote letters to principals describing my study (Appendix C), and explaining why their particular school was selected for participation in the study (demographics and socio-economic status). I informed principals of the benefits of participating in my study, which was that each participating teacher would receive a set of eight, new, high-quality picture books to place in the classroom library. When the principals who were willing to participate contacted me, I scheduled a meeting to discuss the study, to show the eight picture books being used in the study, and to answer any questions the principals had. The principals and I identified kindergarten classrooms that would provide an

adequate number of African American, Caucasian and Latino students. After classrooms were identified, and teachers agreed to participate in the study, I met with each teacher to discuss the study, to explain their role in the study, and to give teachers a letter that outlined the study (Appendix D). Teachers were given the set of eight picture books, and were asked to place the books in the classroom library. I explained to teachers the importance that all books be read with the students in whole-group settings prior to interview administration. Teachers were instructed to read all books to students in the same manner, with enthusiasm and intonation, and without the use of props. These instructions were based on research indicating that the manner in which adults read books to younger readers may influence the readers' book selections and re-selections (Heath, 1982; Teale & Sulzby, 1987; Morrow, 1988). Teachers were also asked to refrain from conducting classroom activities associated with the eight picture books until after data collection. To monitor book readings, I gave teachers a checklist listing all book titles and asked them to check off when the book is read, and indicate the date of the book's reading (Appendix E).

During the meeting with classroom teachers, I distributed the parent consent forms which described the study and requested permission for their child's (students') participation in the study. Teachers distributed parent consent forms to students and collected them when returned. When all parent consent forms were returned for the classroom, I set up a schedule with teachers to come into their classrooms to conduct student interviews. During meetings with teachers, I also shared the expected timeline for the study (Appendix F).

#### *Classroom Interactions Prior to Data Collection*

Prior to data collection, each classroom was given a set of eight, high-quality picture books to place in the classroom library in order to increase student familiarity with each book



title. Also prior to data collection, I spent time in each classroom in order to introduce myself to the students, and to become a more familiar adult to the students. *Prolonged engagement*, which is spending time in the research environment in order to learn the culture and build trust among research participants (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Lincoln, 1985), can increase data trustworthiness and credibility. Prolonged engagement can better establish a foundation for communication, and minimize the threat of “observer effect,” the phenomena of individuals behaving differently due to being observed or the presence of a new and/or unfamiliar individual in the environment (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Gay et al., 2006). I came into each classroom and conducted a group circle-time activity. I introduced myself to the students, explained why I was going to be in their classroom, and concluded with reading a storybook not associated with the study (Christelow, 1992). Prior to my visits, I requested that teachers avoid conducting any activity related to the study’s eight books during my visit so that students have no basis to associate me with a particular picture book being used in the study.

#### Picture Book Selection

The criteria for selecting books for the current study were patterned after a book selection study conducted with first-grade elementary students (Mohr, 2006): high-quality picture books with full-color illustrations; representative of various cultures; cover illustrations clearly showing the culture depicted in the book; and age-appropriate reading level. *Picture books* were used for the current study; picture books are designed for readers approximately ages three to six, and communicate a story through the use of pictures and few words (Nodelman, 1988). To generate a list of possible picture book titles, I consulted book lists from two current research inquiries involving pre-kindergarten students where high-quality picture books were being used. Both studies- *Storytime in Pre-Kindergarten* and

*Project ABC123*- were being conducted by assistant professors in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I also consulted current lists of Caldecott Award and Caldecott Honor books, which recognize picture books containing high-quality illustrations and story content (Chamberlain & Leal, 1999; Marantz & Marantz, 1999). And lastly, I consulted the American Library Association (ALA) Notable Children's Books List, which identifies the "best in children's books" (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/childrensnotable/index.cfm>). From the above stated resources, a preliminary list of high-quality picture books was assembled (Robinson, Larsen, Haupt & Mohiman, 1997), and in consultation with two local public librarians, a local kindergarten teacher, and my doctoral dissertation advisors, eight picture books were chosen to use in the current study (Appendix G).

The eight picture books selected for the study are all categorized as *fiction*. Two books represented African American culture, two books represented Caucasian culture, two books represented Latino culture, and two books were classified as Multicultural. The books were similar in terms of visual content and theme. Each book contained vivid, colorful illustrations and a cover picture that clearly indicated the race of the characters being depicted in the story. The theme of each book was centered around interactions between family and friends. The characters of each book were human beings as opposed to animals, since prior studies suggest that younger readers most often identified the topic of *animals* when explaining certain book selections (Campbell, Griswold & Smith, 1988; Mohr, 2003; Reutzel & Gali, 1998). All books had hardback covers, since research suggests younger readers may prefer hardback versus softback books (Campbell et al., 1988). The eight books

were assigned a letter for the purposes of identification in the study, and were labeled accordingly.

### Pilot Study

A pilot research study was conducted in Spring of 2007 in a local elementary school in a kindergarten-1<sup>st</sup> grade combination class. Piloting data collection strategies with similar research subjects can offer researchers insight into the effectiveness of the research design, and can produce helpful feedback useful towards the authentic study (Agar, 1980). The purpose of the pilot study was to gather information regarding what students noticed most in a book; and what about the plot, characters, and illustrations they liked or disliked. Nine students from various races were selected and individually asked to select a *multicultural* book, from a pre-arranged book set, to read-aloud with me. Subsequent to reading the selected book together, participants were interviewed to gather thoughts and opinions on the respective book. Findings indicated that students frequently noticed: (1) family interactions, (2) interactions between book characters who were 'friends;' (3) colors, (4) animals, and (5) seasons depicted in picture books. Students also noticed familiar activities such as playing in the snow or having a baby sibling in their home.

Through the pilot study I also learned more about qualitative research with younger individuals. I learned more about the appropriate length for interviews conducted with younger participants. Initially the time I worked with the students lasted from 20-30 minutes, however through the pilot study I observed that 10-15 minutes is a more adequate time frame to work with a younger individual. I learned more about what types of interview settings may provide an environment with minimal distractions to the students. Working with students in close vicinity to their peers did not typically create an environment conducive to data

collection. Through the pilot study, I observed that working with students inside their classroom, but in an area that is a distance away from the other students may provide an environment that is both comfortable for the student and has minimal distractions. I also learned more about scheduling practices with schools and classrooms. For example, Fridays were not typically productive days to work with students, and the first part of the school day often turned out to be a good time to work with the students. Conducting the pilot study allowed me to learn valuable information that was useful as I conducted the dissertation study.

### Current Study

The current study sought to elicit information regarding book selections and reading interests of economically-disadvantaged African American kindergarteners, in comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers. Few studies have examined book selection with preschoolers or kindergarten-age participants (Childress, 1985; Robinson et al., 1997). Childress (1985) observed students during school library visits and discovered that differences in children's literature choices, especially gender differences, were evident in kindergarteners and first grade students. The study by Robinson, Larsen, Haupt and Mohiman (1997), involved participants ages four, five and six. Through student book selection, parent surveys, and classroom observations, researchers concluded that students' book selection were influenced by book genre, familiarity with books, the influence of others, and the reading level of the book. While both studies contributed insightful information regarding book selections in younger readers, a limitation was that participants were not interviewed regarding rationales for selecting certain books. In the current study, 160 students participated in interviews designed to elicit information regarding rationales for

book selections. Another limitation to both studies is that findings offered no information regarding how multicultural content in picture books influenced students' book selections. The current study employed specific interview questions designed to gather information regarding the influence of multicultural content on students' book selections for themselves, and peers of similar/different races. Research suggests that children as young as three and four years of age are able to identify racial content, and are able to classify themselves and others according to race (Brand, Ruiz & Padilla, 1974; Semaj, 1980).

#### Demographic Data

The current study was conducted in three elementary schools within one school district in southern North Carolina. The three elementary schools housed three kindergarten classrooms each, and the study included all students and teachers from all Kindergarten classrooms. As a result, the study included a total of nine classrooms and a total of 160 kindergarten students. The study's sample included African American, Caucasian, Latino, Bi-racial and Native American students. Originally, all students who were not African American, Caucasian, or Latino were to be placed in the category, *Other*. However, regarding the Other participants in the study, all except one were Bi-racial, and one was Native American. As a result, the category Other was eliminated, and the specific categories of Bi-racial and Native American were added to the participants' descriptions. Table 4.1 presents demographic data describing the participant sample. Data was collected regarding participants' race and gender.

## Data Collection

### *Student Interviews*

Interviews were conducted with all 160 students who participated in the study (Appendix H). Interviews took place in a naturalistic setting, a quiet area inside or right outside of the classroom, which may have increased participants' comfort level and allowed for more authentic participant behaviors (Glesne, 2006; Lincoln, 1985). The eight picture books being used in the study were displayed on a table at participants' eye-level (Mohr, 2006), in random order (Martinez et al., 1997; Morrow, 1982). Individual students were invited to the interviewing area, and together we reviewed the eight picture books; afterwards, we proceeded with the interview. The interview consisted of eight questions, and the duration of interviews was approximately 10 minutes. The authentic interview questions were piloted with children of similar age to the actual research participants for the current study (Agar, 1980), and were modified to enhance clarity and student comprehension.

Throughout the interview, I asked *verification questions* (Bodgan & Bilken, 1998), which is a method of *member checking* (Merriam, 1995), to ensure that I had clearly understood the participants' answers. Verification questions essentially repeat the interviewees' answers and allow the interviewee to confirm that their thoughts and feelings have been accurately recorded; and if not, the interviewee can restate interview responses to more accurately reflect their true thoughts and feelings. Interviews were audio-taped in order to provide an *audit trail* (Halpern, 1983), and I also recorded raw/written interview notes as a means of verifying data (Glesne, 2006). *Interview elaborations*, personal thoughts and reactions during interviews (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993), were also recorded. Interviews

were transcribed shortly following interviews, while information remained fresh in the researcher's mind (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996).

Student conversations, or student interviews, were semi-structured (Gay et al., 2006; Glesne, 2006) in order to effectively elicit rationales for students' book selections. Literature discussing qualitative research methodology with elementary-age students outlines benefits and potential limitations of interviewing young children *both* individually, and in small groups or pairs (Glesne, 2006; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Guba, 1981; Wolcott, 1994). For the current study, I interviewed students individually. I concluded that spending time in the classroom prior to data collection, and administering interviews in a naturalistic classroom setting were practices that would increase or maintain student comfort. The semi-structured interviews followed guiding questions, but also maintained a flexible nature permitting leeway with interviewees (Gay et al., 2006). Questions were open-ended, a strategy that often elicits more detailed answers (Glesne, 2006). I exercised *patient probing* (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2002; Glesne, 2006) by using phrases such as, "tell me more," "what do you mean," or "explain that to me," in order to elicit more, or clarifying information. During interviews I also exercised *wait time*, a practice imperative to use when interviewing small children as it allows participants sufficient time for comprehension and cognitive processing (Glaser & Straus, 1967).

The initial interview question asked students to select their favorite book and to give a rationale as to why that particular book was their favorite book to read. After the student had been interviewed regarding the book they selected for themselves, I proceeded to interview the student regarding the books they thought peers of different/similar races would select as favorite books to read. Students were shown picture collages of students, and were asked to

select a book that each group of children would most enjoy reading. Students were also asked to elicit rationales for why the respective group of children would enjoy reading the book. The purpose of asking students to select books for peers of similar/different races was to elicit more information regarding how multicultural content of picture books may influence students' book selections and reading interests. Following the example of prior studies that used visual picture cues to elicit information from pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students (Freeman, 2007; NICHD Study of Early Child Care, 1997; Semaj, 1980), participants were shown three separate color picture collages of children who appear to be the same age as the actual research participants (Appendix H). Participants were asked to select a book they thought the children in the photograph would most want to read. The three picture collages depicted African American, Caucasian, and Latino children. Picture cues showing children who matched the participant's race were labeled as *same race picture*, and picture cues showing children who were of different race from the participant were labeled as *different race picture* (Johnson & Castillo, 1994). Several studies evaluating racial identity in young children have indicated that children as young as ages three and four are able to classify themselves and other individuals according to race (Brand et al., 1974; Semaj, 1980).

#### Data Sources

The data collection strategies of student book selections and student interviews were utilized in the current study. Employing multiple data collection strategies during research inquiries can often increase reliability and validity of research (Glesne, 2002; Lincoln, 1985). Using multiple data sources also allows researchers to gather a more complete picture of the phenomena being studied (Gay et al., 2006; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). Multiple data sources allow researchers to cross-check information and, if necessary, compensate for



weaknesses in one method with the strengths of another method (Gay et al., 2006; Glesne, 2006). Data was collected until *saturation* occurred (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln, 1985).

Saturation is the practice of collecting data until information begins to repeat itself, indicating that a sufficient amount of data has been gathered.

### Positionality

Most individuals conduct research because they have a personal interest with the topic being studied (Aubrey et al., 2002). Researchers must recognize *positionality*, or *identity stance*, and document who they are as researchers and what factors may influence their opinions and perspectives during data collection and analysis (Gay et al., 2006; Glesne, 2006). I have identified several factors that may influence my thinking towards the current study: (1) three years of classroom teaching experience with pre-kindergarten students; (2) identifying as an African American female who as a child preferred picture books featuring other African American females; and (3) writing/publishing a children's picture book in Albania, Eastern Europe, and observing reactions in young children while reading my book. The reactions seemed inspired by similarities in the book's content to the culture of the children reading the book. I recognized my positionality, and exerted effort so that my perspective did not compromise the level of accuracy and honesty in which data was collected, analyzed and reported (Glesne, 2006).

### Qualitative Analysis

#### *Introduction*

Data collected from student interviews answered Research Question 1, (In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, how do African American kindergarteners describe the book selections they make for themselves, and peers of similar/different races?).

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed with the assistance of *Atlas.ti, Version 4.2*, a qualitative data analysis software package designed to assist in the analysis of textual, graphical, audio or video data. Interview data were analyzed using a three-step process: 1) open coding, 2) axial coding, and 3) selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding is the progressive process of sorting and defining collected data (Glesne, 2006), and can be thought of as a range of approaches that forward the organization, retrieval and interpretation of data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The current section describes the three-step process of coding used to analyze interviewing data. All student interviews were not used during qualitative analyses. All interviews of African American, Latino, Bi-racial and Native American participants were used during qualitative analyses; however, only a portion of interviews from Caucasian participants were included. In the county where data collection took place, the student population contained higher percentages of Caucasian students, approximately 60 percent, in comparison to the students of color. During data collection, due to the young age of the student participants, it was concluded that it would not be fair or appropriate to select certain students to be interviewed. Therefore, each student who had parental consent to participate in the study was interviewed. A total of 160 students were interviewed: African American, 37; Caucasian, 85; Latino, 16; Bi-racial, 21; and Native American, 1. Interviewing data amongst the racial groups were notably uneven, and under advisement of the dissertation advisor and the qualitative faculty tutor, a portion of interviews with Caucasian students were randomly selected in order to establish more of a balance amongst the numbers of interviews for each racial group. During random selection, 47 interviews with Caucasian students were selected and used for qualitative analyses. A total of 122 student interviews overall were used during

qualitative analyses. Table 4.2 presents demographic data of the interviewing sample used for the current study.

### *Open Coding*

To examine the rationales for students' book selections, interviewing data was first analyzed by open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding is the process of analyzing interviews line-by-line and organizing information into themes, or open categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During primary readings of the interview transcripts, 38 open codes were initially identified; however, four of the open codes were similar enough to collapse into one open code. First, the open codes of Describes Pictures, defined as "retelling the story based on the book's illustrations," and Story Recall, defined as "responses in the form of retelling the book's story," were collapsed into the open code Story Recall With or Without Assistance of Illustrations. Next, the open codes of Action, defined as "references to the action or events taking place in the story," and Theme/Topic, defined as "references to a theme or topic depicted in the book," were both collapsed into Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations. After collapsing similar open codes, 35 open codes remained as rationales for book selections of all research participants. Table 4.3 presents the 35 open codes and definitions that were used in the current study.

### *Axial Coding*

After open codes were identified, interview transcripts were further analyzed in order to create axial codes. Axial codes are formulated by grouping open categories into super categories based on similarity and overlap (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the secondary phase of analysis, seven axial codes were formulated based on the 35 open codes generated during primary analysis. The axial code Random, defined as "unrelated, irrelevant or

inconclusive rationales for book selections,” is both an open and axial code, and represents students’ responses ranging from “because,” “I don’t know,” to no response at all. Three open codes were included under two axial codes based on having significance to both axial codes. The open codes Dancing, Language/Words and Music are grouped under both axial codes Story Element and Cultural Element. Table 4.4 presents the seven axial code groupings, and corresponding open codes, formulated to explain rationales for book selections of the kindergarten participants in the current study.

### *Selective Coding*

After formulating axial codes, the third and final step in the coding and analysis process was selective coding, which is defined as integrating and refining theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), or the formulation of a mini framework (Glesne, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Information from both axial and open codes were analyzed and interpreted to formulate explanatory information regarding students’ book selections, and draw conclusions regarding rationales for book selection of African American, Caucasian and Latino kindergarteners. These conclusions are presented in the Discussion chapter.

### *Quantitative Analysis*

The *Statistical Analysis Software, Version 9.2 (SAS)* was used to analyze data collected from students’ book selections. Descriptive data analysis, presented in the following chapter, show which books were most frequently chosen by African American, Caucasian, Latino, and *Other* participants. This data is visually displayed and is presented in the form of tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To answer Research Question 2, (In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, do African American kindergarteners select books based on multicultural content?), *SAS*,

*Version, 9.2*, was used to perform multinomial logistic regression in order to compare book selections of the four racial groups participating in the study: (1) African American, (2) Caucasian, (3) Latino, and (4) Bi-racial. Multinomial logistic regression is used to analyze relationships between a non-metric dependent variable, and metric or dichotomous independent variables (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The independent variable for the current study was race, and the dependent variable was book selection. Multinomial logistic regression refers to non-metric independent variables as *factors*. The independent factor of *race* is nominal, however it was still appropriate to use multinomial logistic regression analysis since *SAS* automatically dichotomizes nominal independent variables during analysis. For example, the race group *African American* was compared to *Caucasian*, *African American* was compared to *Latino*, *Caucasian* was compared to *Latino*, etc. Output from the multinomial logistic regression analysis established if multicultural content in books had an influence on book selections of African American, Caucasian, Latino or Bi-racial students.

The overall test of relationship among the independent variable (race), and the dependent variable, (book selections of the four racial groups participating in the current study), was based on a chi-square distribution (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The significance test for the chi-square model provided statistical evidence, if any, of the presence of a relationship between the factors of race and book selection. A Chi-Square output of .05 or less indicates a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and allows the respective null hypothesis to be rejected.

## Reliability

The question of reliability (Gay et al., 2006) regarding the analysis of student interviewing data was addressed during the coding process using the assistance of two individuals who have extensive experience with qualitative design and analysis. I worked with a faculty tutor at the UNC Statistical Counseling Lab on a consistent basis in order to maintain accuracy throughout the processes of coding and analysis. I also worked with a doctoral education student who completed an advanced qualitative methods course, and a qualitative doctoral dissertation study involving interviewing and coding. The doctoral student read transcripts of four randomly chosen student interviews and provided feedback regarding open and axial codes. Also, the doctoral student independently coded interviewing data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), prior to viewing my codes. After independently coding the four interview transcripts, the doctoral student and I compared codes to check for inter-rater reliability (Gay et al., 2006; Lincoln, 1985), defined as the extent to which two or more individuals (coders or raters) agree (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Inter-rater reliability addresses the consistency of the implementation of a rating system (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), and for the current study, the goal of inter-rater reliability was to reach 80 percent or higher agreement with open and axial codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

During the analysis of interviewing data, confidentiality of all people and places was maintained (Gay et al., 2006). Pseudonyms were used to describe all names and locations associated with the study (Hatch, 2007).

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

The current study addressed the following research questions:

1. In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, how do African American kindergarteners describe book selections they make for themselves, and peers of similar/different races?
2. In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, do African American kindergarteners select books based on multicultural content?

The following null hypotheses were tested for the current study:

- Null Hypothesis 1      African American kindergarteners will not select picture books for themselves based on multicultural content.
- Null Hypothesis 2      African American kindergarteners will not select books for peers of similar and different races based on multicultural content.

The research findings in the current chapter are presented in two sections. The first section presents qualitative analyses conducted to answer Research Question 1, and reports rationales for book selections of African American students in comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers. The second section of the current chapter presents data describing book selections of all research participants. The second section also presents data from statistical analyses conducted to answer Research Question 2, and to address Null Hypotheses 1 and 2.

### Findings of the Interviewing Data: “Talks with the Book Lady”

The interviewing data revealed information in response to Research Question 1, “In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, how do African American kindergarteners describe book selections they make for themselves, and peers of similar/different races?” Seven axial codes were formulated from the interviewing data, and represent the seven areas of responses, or rationales, discovered during the current study regarding participants’ book selections. Table 4.5 presents information regarding numbers and percentages for book selection rationales of the African American, Caucasian, Latino and Bi-racial participants in the current study. Below, participants’ rationales for book selections are discussed by the seven axial codes being used in the current study.

In the current and following chapters, there is minimal discussion regarding information from the Latino participants in the study. Sixteen Latino students participated in the study and the majority of these students spoke English as a second language. The quality and quantity of information gathered from the Latino students during interviews may have been affected by their developing abilities with the English language. During interviews, I was able to communicate to a certain degree in Spanish, but not with the proficiency and accuracy of a native Spanish speaker. As a result, the study did not gather a great deal of information regarding rationales for book selections of the Latino participants, and the information included in the current and following chapters regarding these participants is minimal.



## *Cultural Content*

### *African American Participants*

Cultural Content is defined as rationales for book selections that are associated with aspects of the reader's race or culture. Seven open codes were included under Cultural Content: Cool, Dancing, Racial/Cultural Identity, Hip Hop, Language/Words, Music and Windows. Cultural Content represents the second most popular responses given by African American participants, with a total of 128 comments. Language/Words received the highest number of responses from African American participants, specifically 55. The majority of African American participants commented on language used in *Yo, Jo*, which is a book that uses "urban" language such as, "yo, bro, [hello]" "catch you later, [see you later]" and "s'up, [what's up]." Fifteen out of the 24 African American participants who commented on Language/Words made comments regarding *Yo Jo*. Several participants remarked, "the words are cool," and that the words were, "hip hop words." Others commented on specific phrases, "he always says 'yo jo,'" "he said 'ima catch you later,'" and "cause that little boy, he said 'hit me wit it.'" Several students offered comments indicating an awareness that the language in *Yo Jo* was not Standard English, for example, "he can't say stuff real good," "he can't talk real good, he just says 'get crunk wit it,'" "cause he talk funny," or "cause they talk different." Several students offered translations for the phrases used in *Yo, Jo*, for example, "when he says 'get crunk wit it' that means get crazy with it," "somebody said 'catch you later.' That's what you say when you don't got nothing else to say. You say bye." Other students commented on similarities in how they talk, and how characters from *Yo Jo* talked. And some participants made connections with language from the book and the manner in which people in their families talked; for example, "because that's what my mama says," and

“my paw-paw, he says ‘catch you later.’” Four African American participants commented on language from the book *Roar of a Snore*, two commented on *Jazz Baby*, and one commented on language from *Knuffle Bunny*.

African American participants also noted the use of Spanish language in books used in the current study; and several students commented that their Latino peers would enjoy reading those particular books. One African American male selected a book with Spanish words when asked what book his Latino peers would want to read; he commented, “they [the book] was saying Spanish words.” He went further to say his Latino peers would like the book, “because they talk Spanish.” Another African American male categorized the two books containing Spanish content as “Mexican,” and commented that he would not select those two books for himself, “because I can’t talk Spanish. I don’t like them. You gotta talk Spanish to read that book.” He also commented that his Latino peers would enjoy the books with Spanish language because, “they talk Puerto Rican. They look like they read Spanish.”

The second most popular rationales for book selections among African American participants under Cultural Content were comments categorized as Racial/Cultural Identity. Fourteen of the 37 African American participants offered comments in this category. Several selected books for themselves and peers based on similarities in physical appearance; for example, “cause they look Spanish,” “cause they look the same,” “because they look like *Yo Jo*,” “they got the same eyes,” and “cause they all black [African American].” One African American male chose *Bebe Goes Shopping* for Latino peers and commented, “because they look like *Bebe Goes Shopping*. They got black eyes, because they got eyes like Bebe’s mama.” One African American female selected *Jazz Baby* and commented, “cause it’s like our family;” she went further to describe the “extended” family structure that exists in her

household. Several students commented on the use of the “high five” gesture that is common in many African American communities, and remarked that “high fives” were common in their households.

Twenty- eight African American participants offered rationales for book selections related to Music, and 10 made comments related to Dancing. One African American female commented that she selected *Jazz Baby* because the baby was, “hip hoppin’.” When asked to explain what “hip hoppin’” was, she said, “when you dance.” Three students indicated that the story or the words were Cool, and two students commented on Hip Hop content in the books used in the current study. Table 4.6 presents information regarding book selection rationales categorized as Cultural Content for African American, Caucasian, Latino and Bi-racial participants in the current study.

#### *Caucasian Participants*

Cultural Content was also the second most popular rationale for book selections among Caucasian participants. Overall, there were 201 comments made by Caucasian students regarding rationales for book selections based on Cultural Content. Similar to African American participants, Language/Words received the most comments from the Caucasian students, specifically 90. Out of 47 Caucasian participants, 37 offered rationales for book selections based on the book’s choice of words. Several students gave general comments on the book’s language, either recalling words or phrases from the books, or remarking that the words were “good” or “funny.” Twenty-five participants made comments on language used in *Yo Jo*, for example, “they talk different,” “because they [had] some new, good, hip and hop words I learned,” and “cause it will teach them funny words, like ‘yo bro.’” One student selected *Yo Jo* because, “they keep saying ‘yo jo’ ....cause they rhyme.”

Seven students commented on *Jazz Baby*, either recalling language from the main character, the baby, or stating that they liked how the baby talked in the book. Three students commented on language from *Bebe Goes Shopping*; and the books *Knuffle Bunny*, *Roar of a Snore* and *We All Sing With the Same Voice* all garnered one comment a piece from Caucasian participants.

Several Caucasian participants made comments regarding Language/Words that involved the use of Spanish language in the books used in the current study. Nine students offered rationales for book selections for themselves and peers of different/similar races based on the presence of Spanish in the study's books. One Caucasian male who selected a book with Spanish language for his Latino peers commented, "and some of these words are Spanish and they [Latino peers] can understand." One female stated that she liked reading books with Spanish because, "I'd like to learn about Spanish. Because I want to be a karate person and karate person speak Spanish." Another female also stated that she liked reading books with Spanish, "so I can learn Spanish. So I can speak Spanish for other people who doesn't know English." A Caucasian male acknowledged that he did not speak Spanish, but still selected the book with Spanish language. He commented, "there are Spanish words in there, I don't know how to say 'em." And lastly, one student commented that Spanish language was the reason why he did not choose particular books used in the study. He commented, "I don't like Spanish. Because speaking Spanish is different from speaking English. Yeah, the Spanish kids will [select the book]."

The second most popular rationales for book selections among Caucasian participants under Cultural Content were comments categorized as Racial/Cultural Identity. Many of these students noticed diversity in the books used for the study, and selected books based on

the diversity or differences the books presented. One male chose *We All Sing With the Same Voice* because, “they sung and they came from different places,” and another female chose the same book and commented, “because they’re different people and same. There’s different color hair. Different eyes. Cause they got different color bodies.” Several students selected books for peers based on similarities in physical features. One male explained book selection for a peer, “cause it looks like they’re the same [peer and characters in book]. He looks like him. They’re both brown,” and another female explained her book selections for peers, “because she has the same hair as her.” Another female explained book selections for peers as, “because they all have black hair,” another commented, “cause she looks a little bit alike. They both got black hair,” and another male commented, “because she has just like the hair like him.... he looks like him because he’s got the same skin.” One female explained that the language used in *Yo Jo* is similar to language she used at home with her brother.

Thirty-one Caucasian participants commented on Music, and 13 commented on Dancing. One male selected *Yo Jo* because, “I like to dance,” and also commented that he selected the book, “because it has rappin’.” I asked the Caucasian male what “rapping” was, and he responded, “it’s where your hat is turned about sideways, and when somebody plays a DJ, and they start dancing.” Four participants commented on the books being Cool, and two commented on the presence of Hip Hop content in the books used for the study.

### *Latino Participants*

Latino participants selected Cultural Content as their third most popular explanations for book selections for the current study. Latino students offered a total of 21 comments regarding Cultural Content. Thirteen participants commented on Language/Words used in the study’s books, with the majority commenting on language from *Yo Jo*. Five commented on

Music, and there were two comments regarding Racial/Cultural Identity. One Latino female selected *Bebe Goes Shopping*, “because it talks like Spanish,” and another female selected a book, “because it has English.”

### *Bi-racial Participants*

Bi-racial students offered comments regarding Cultural Content as the second most common rationales for book selections, with a total of 82 comments. Thirty-nine students commented on Language/Words used in the study’s books. Eight Bi-racial students commented on language used in *Yo Jo*, stating that they liked the words or that the words were “funny.” Several students acknowledge that how characters talked in *Yo Jo* was not Standard English. One female commented, “because they talk all funny,” and another female stated, “[because] people saying weird stuff.” A Bi-racial male selected the book *Yo Jo* because, “my daddy say ‘yo jo,’” and several students remarked that the words in *Yo Jo* were “cool.” The books *Jazz Baby* and *Roar of a Snore* both received one comment each regarding Language/Words from Bi-racial participants in the current study.

Four students made comments regarding Spanish language present in the books used in the current study. One Bi-racial female, whose racial make-up was African American and Latino, selected *Bebe Goes Shopping*, “because it’s my favorite. And I got a Spanish grandma who talks Spanish. That’s why I like it,” and another Bi-racial female whose racial make-up was also African American and Latino, chose the same book and remarked, “because it has Spanish and I’m Spanish.” She went further to say, “My mom would like it because it has Spanish in it.” Another Bi-racial female of African American and Caucasian descent selected *Bebe Goes Shopping* for her Latino peers.

She stated, “cause when the teacher read it she had to ask all the Spanish people in here what does that mean. Cause she don’t know Spanish. They told her what it

means cause they can speak English and Spanish. They can understand it and we can't. Because there's lots of Spanish stuff in it and it's all really funny cause there's a whole lot of Spanish in this book.

Bi-racial participants had a total of 18 rationales for book selections related to Racial/Cultural Identity. Several of these comments are discussed in the previous paragraph, where students made references to similarities in the language of books selected, and language spoken at home. In the previous paragraph, it was also discussed how the presence of Spanish language inspired several book selections. The Bi-racial participants went on to explain book selections based on physical appearances. Some of the comments were, "because they look the same," "because they're pretty and the book is pretty," and "because they both have smiles." One Bi-racial female explained book selection for a peer, "they don't have the same hair." Sixteen students commented on Music, four students mentioned Hip Hop, and three stated that the books were Cool.

### *Story Elements*

Story Elements are defined as rationales for book selections that are related to the book's story or illustrations. Twelve open codes were grouped under the axial code Story Elements: Boy Books, Dancing, Fiction, Funny/Humor, Girl Book, Good Story, Language/Words, Music, Non-Fiction, Rhyme, Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations, and Surprise/Suspense. Story Elements received the highest amount of comments from each of the four race groups being studied in the current study: African American, Caucasian, Latino and Bi-racial. Reported below are findings regarding comments categorized as Story Elements for each of the race groups used in the current study. Table 4.7 presents information regarding book selection rationales categorized as Story Elements for African American, Caucasian, Latino and Bi-racial participants in the current study.

### *African American Participants*

African American participants gave a total of 331 rationales for book selections that fall under the axial code Story Elements. The majority of comments from African American participants were regarding Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations, with a total of 207 comments. When asked to explain book selections, the majority of the students recalled events from the story, sometimes while looking at the illustrations or turning through the book and using visual cues. Fifty-five participants commented on words used in the book, and several students indicated that the words gave meaning to the story, or assisted with comprehending the story. One female stated, “the pictures go along with the words, the words go along with the pictures.” Other students commented on the mere presence of the words, for example, “I like pages with words,” “they say, they have every word,” and “I like the flowers on the page, and the words.” Others commented on the physical appearance of the words, “cause they’re bright,” “because, yellow words,” and “because it got red and blue words.” Twenty-eight participants commented on the presence of Music or singing in the books, and 20 students offered comments regarding the open code Funny/Humor. Several students stated that the story or pictures were “funny” or “fun to read,” and several others recalled how “everyone was laughing when the teacher read it [the book].” Two individuals commented on the presence of Fiction and Non-Fiction material in the book. An African American female stated, “It was real. It was real stuff, like real apartments and schools. And cartoon characters on there. The school is real, and the washerette is real, and that [picture] is only cartoon characters.” This female was describing Fiction and Non-Fiction material from the book *Knuffle Bunny*. Four participants commented on the books being a Boy Book, and two mentioned the theme Girl Book.



### *Caucasian Participants*

Caucasian participants offered a total of 540 comments regarding Story Elements in the current study. The theme Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations garnered the most comments, specifically 303. When asked to give rationales for book selections, the majority of these students recalled events from the story, sometimes while looking at the illustrations or turning through the book and using visual cues. Ninety students commented on the book's Language/Words. Several students indicated a connection between words in the story and story comprehension. For example, one female explained her selection of *Jazz Baby* stating, "because they [the words] tell the story about what the baby does," and another male explained his selection of *Yo Jo* as, "cause it [the words] tells you all the pictures and what they're doing." One male commented, "the pictures match the words. These actually match." And lastly, a male commented that, "the words make the pages better." Other students commented on the actual presence of the words and on the physical appearance of the words. Thirty-one students commented on the presence of Music and singing, and 13 students commented on the presence of Dancing in the study's book.

Seven Caucasian students commented on Non-Fiction and six commented on Fiction material in the books used in the current study. Six comments were made regarding the theme Boy Book. One male stated that a particular book was a Boy Book because, "there are boys on the front cover [of the book]," and another male stated that a particular book was a Boy Book because it had "boy stuff" in it. Four comments were offered regarding the theme Girl Book, and a Caucasian male stated, "I don't want to read that book. I only want to read boy books," when asked to explain his dislike for the book *Bebe Goes Shopping*. Two students commented on the use of Rhyme, and one female commented on the element of

Surprise/Suspense. The female student selected *Tooth on the Loose* and indicated that the book presented an element of scariness, “it’s scary to think about my tooth getting pulled.”

#### *Latino Participants*

Latino participants made a total of 83 comments associated with the theme Story Elements, with 50 of the comments falling under the theme Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations. Fourteen participants commented on the theme Funny/Humor, stating that the book or pictures were “funny” and the books were “fun to read.” Thirteen Caucasian participants made comments regarding Language/Words. One individual stated, “the words go [read] fast,” and another commented, “there were a lot of words.” Five students mentioned the presence of Music in the book’s storyline, and one Latino student mentioned the presence of Dancing as a rationale for book selection.

#### *Bi-racial Participants*

Bi-racial participants made 228 comments on Story Elements, with the 140 comments falling under the theme Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations. Thirty-nine participants offered comments regarding Language/Words, with several comments indicating an association between the words in the book and story comprehension. For example, “cause I like the words cause it helps me read,” and “cause it [the words] shows us so we can read.” Several comments were made regarding the physical appearance of the words in the book, and one female remarked that she liked the spacing used with the words in the book. She stated, “cause it has ‘finger spaces.’” When asked what ‘finger spaces’ were, she explained, “It means the words have finger spaces. Cause it looks neat. You can put your finger between the words.” Twenty-one students made comments associated with the theme Funny/Humor, indicating that the story or illustrations were “funny,” or that the book was

“fun to read.” Other students recalled how their class laughed during group readings of a book, and one individual commented that, “the title was funny,” when asked to give a rationale for selecting the book *Knuffle Bunny*. Five Bi-racial students commented on Non-Fiction material in the books, stating that the pictures were, “real,” and the books were, “real life.” Only one student commented on the presence of Fiction material in the book. One female commented on the theme Surprise/Suspense, and stated, “sleeping, scary, cause it’s dark,” when asked to give a rationale for selecting the book *Roar of a Snore*.

### *Book Elements*

Book Elements are defined as rationales for book selections that are related to physical aspects of the book. A total of 11 open codes were grouped under Book Elements: Award Winner, Book Cover, Book Size or Shape, Illustrations, Illustrations: Colors, Length, Letters, New Book/Never Read Before, Page Layout, Pretty/Beautiful, and Title. In the current section, responses are described from African American participants, followed by responses from the other student participants. Table 4.8 presents information regarding book selection rationales categorized as Book Elements for African American, Caucasian, Latino and Bi-racial participants in the current study.

Book Elements represent the third most popular responses given by African American participants as rationales for book selections, with a total of 117 responses. Of the 37 African American participants, 30 commented on Illustrations. A few noteworthy comments from the students include, “the pictures go along with the words,” “the pictures were fun to look at,” “the pictures were shiny or glossy,” and “the illustrations were big.” Twenty-seven students commented on Illustrations: Colors, commenting that illustrations were, “bright,” “dark,” and “had lots of colors.” Nineteen participants selected books based

on the Book Cover, and seven participants choose books based on the physical appearance or arrangement of the Letters. Two participants responded New Book/Never Read Before; for example, one of the two students, an African American female, explained her book selection accordingly, “because this is the best book I haven’t had.”

Book Elements represent the third most popular responses given by Caucasian participants as rationales for book selections, with a total of 167 comments. Illustrations received the highest number of comments under Book Elements, with a total of 61. Students commented that, “the illustrations are pretty,” “the illustrator did a good job,” and “the pictures match the words,” or “the pictures match the story.” Other noteworthy comments include, “the pictures are nice to look at,” and “the pictures made the story good.” Only 11 participants commented on Illustrations: Colors, remarking that, “the pictures are colorful,” “the pictures are made of different colors,” and “the pictures had gray and brown [non-fiction illustrations].” The next most common responses for book selections were regarding Letters, with 19 responses. The participants commented on the appearance of the letters, the physical arrangement of the letters on the pages, and that the letters were “big [font size]” or “fancy [font type]”. One female commented on the presence of “finger spaces” regarding the physical appearance of the words in the book, and another female commented on the reading level of the words in the book, stating, “cause they’re, I like long words.” Eighteen students selected books based on the Book Cover, or mentioned the plastic book jacket that covered the entire book. One student commented that he liked the book, “cause it [the book cover] shows you the title and who wrote it.” Other popular responses were Page Layout, with 17 responses, and Pretty/Beautiful, with 16 responses.

The Latino participants offered Book Elements as the second most popular rationales for book selections, with 27 comments. Seven participants selected books based on the Illustrations, and commented that, “the illustrations were funny” or that they “like the book because of the pictures.” Five participants selected books based on aesthetic value, or Pretty/Beautiful, and four participants commented on the theme New Book/Never Read Before as a rationale for book selections.

Bi-racial participants offered Book Elements as the third most popular rationale for book selections, with 81 comments. Similar to African American, Caucasian, and Latino participants, Illustrations received the highest number of comments, specifically 23, as rationales for book selections. One Bi-racial participant commented on the texture of the illustrations, saying “I like the ripped-up pages right here,” a reference to illustrations from *Yo, Jo* that resembled pieces of ripped-up newspaper. One participant remarked that, “the pictures are cool,” and another participant indicated the illustrations offered too much stimulation, “it [illustrations] shows too many things.” This particular student was commenting on an illustration from the book *Knuffle Bunny*, which depicted four separate “scenes” on a two-page spread from the book. The next most popular responses were Pretty/Beautiful, with participants commenting that, “the words are pretty,” or “the book is cute.” Thirteen students commented on Illustrations: Colors, and noted the presence of many colors, and the presence of colors used to depict non-fiction pictures (grays, browns). Several students remarked, “the pictures are shiny,” and a few remarked, “the pictures are dark,” and indicated a sense of scariness associated with those colors.

### *Character Elements*

Character Elements are defined as rationales for book selections that are related to the characters depicted in the book. A total of four open codes were grouped under Character Elements, including: Animals, Babies, Characters, and Families. For African American participants, Character Elements ranked fourth out of the seven axial code groupings being used in the current study. A total of 64 participants offered responses related to the book's characterization as rationales for book selection. The majority of responses in the Character Elements category were in reference to Animals. Ironically, the books used in the study were purposely selected to have human beings as characters and not animals, since prior studies have indicated that younger readers most often identified the topic of animals when explaining certain book selections (Campbell et al., 1988; Mohr, 2003; Reutzel & Gali, 1998). However, with some of the books used in the current study, animals were depicted as secondary or background characters. Twenty-nine African American participants commented on Animals as rationales for book selections. Twenty participants commented on Babies, 11 participants commented on the books' characters, and four commented on the presence of Families as a rationale for book selection.

Character Elements ranked fourth out of the seven axial codes being used in the study amongst Caucasian participants. An overwhelming number of participants, specifically 47, made comments about Babies found in or on the front cover of the book. Twenty-seven participants mentioned Characters in general in the books, 23 commented on Animals, and no participants mentioned the presence of Families as a rationale for book selections.

Latino and Bi-racial participants also ranked Character Elements as fourth out of the seven axial codes being used in the current study. Latino participants had a total of 18

comments regarding Character Elements as a rationale for book selections. Nine participants commented on the presence of Characters in general, eight commented on the presence of Babies, and there were no comments regarding Animals or Families. Bi-racial participants offered 30 comments regarding Character Elements. Eighteen commented on Babies, 16 commented on Characters in general, 13 commented on Animals in the book, and there were no comments regarding the presence of Families.

### *External Influences*

The axial code External Influences is defined as responses related to book selections that are based on the influence of other people or outside influences. Two open codes were included under the axial code External Influences, including Media and Other People. External Influences was the sixth most popular rationale for book selections among African American participants, with a total of 25 comments. Seven African American participants selected books based on the influence of Other People. The individuals most frequently named as influences on book selections were teachers, family members and friends. Four African American participants gave rationales for book selections based on Media influences. One female mentioned a children's television show, *Between the Lions*, and another female selected *Jazz Baby* because, "they got the movie, the Jazz Baby movie and it was good." Three students selected *We All Sing With the Same Voice* because the book came (unexpectedly) with a Compact Disk (CD) that contained the book's theme song.

Caucasian participants also gave rationales categorized as External Influences as the sixth most popular reason for book selections, with a total of 27 responses. Twenty-two participants commented on Other People, with the majority naming teachers as an influence on book selections. Fourteen students offered responses related to Media. One female

mentioned *Tumblebooks*, which is a website that offers animated online picture books for young readers ([www.tumblebooks.com](http://www.tumblebooks.com)). Another female mentioned the children's television show *Between the Lions*, one male mentioned seeing a book advertised on a television commercial, and another female commented that she had seen the book she selected on the children's television show *Sponge Bob Square Pants*. Another male commented on the children's television show *Black Jack*, and five students selected *We All Sing With the Same Voice* because of the musical CD that accompanied the book.

Latino participants only offered two comments related to External Influences, placing this category sixth out of the seven axial codes being used in the current study. One participant commented that she selected a book because of the musical CD accompanying the book, and another Latino participant selected a book, "because my teacher read it to me." Bi-racial participants also ranked External Influences as sixth out of the seven axial codes being used in the study. Nine students commented that Other People had influenced their book selections, specifically teachers and family members. And five offered comments regarding Media, and stated that they chose *We All Sing With the Same Voice* because of the musical CD accompanying the book.

### *Prior Knowledge*

Prior Knowledge is defined as rationales for book selections based on prior experiences that are related to the book, or the fact that the reader has read the book previously. Two open codes were included under Prior Knowledge, including Prior Experience and Read Before. African American participants offered 24 comments related to Prior Knowledge, making it the least popular rationale for book selections. Several African American participants mentioned Prior Experiences related to the books they selected, and



several students who selected *Tooth on the Loose* commented on experiences with losing teeth and being visited by the tooth fairy. Nine African American participants said they selected a particular book because they had read it previously on their own, with family members, or at previous school settings. Caucasian participants offered a total of 32 comments regarding Prior Knowledge, which ranked this axial code as fifth out of the seven axial codes being used in the current study. Twenty-eight students commented on Prior Experiences as rationales for book selections. The most common responses were related to the books *Tooth on the Loose* and *Bebe Goes Shopping*. Regarding *Tooth on the Loose*, students commented on experiences with losing teeth and being visited by the tooth fairy; and with *Bebe Goes Shopping*, students commented on having baby siblings in their home and going shopping with their caregivers. Four Caucasian participants selected books because they had read them previously.

For Latino students, only one participant offered a comment related to Prior Knowledge, placing this axial grouping as the least popular rationale for book selections. One student mentioned Prior Experience as a rationale for selecting *Bebe Goes Shopping*, stating, “I go shopping, too.” Bi-racial participants offered 16 comments regarding Prior Knowledge. Prior Experience received all 16 comments, as no Bi-racial students indicated that they selected books based on reading it previously. The most common responses from these participants were regarding the books *Bebe Goes Shopping* and *Tooth on the Loose*. Students made several comments regarding experiences with going to grocery stores and going shopping, and also with losing teeth and being visited by the tooth fairy.

### *Random*

The axial code Random is defined as rationales for book selections that are inconclusive or unrelated to the topic of book selection. Rationales for book selections that were not related to the book, or when students gave no answers to interview questions, were categorized as Random. African American participants gave 29 Random responses, placing Random as fifth among the seven axial codes being used in the current study. Caucasian participants offered 24 Random comments, placing this category as the least common rationale for book selections. Latino participants offered 14 Random comments, placing Random as fifth out of the seven axial codes. And lastly, Bi-racial students offered 17 statements in the Random category, making it fifth out of the seven codes being used in the study.

### Quantitative Analyses

#### *Book Selections of Individual Participants*

The current section addresses Research Question 2, which asked, “In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, do African American kindergarteners select books based on multicultural content?” Table 4.9 presents data reporting book selections of the African American, Caucasian, Latino, Bi-racial and Native American participants. The categories *African American Books*, *Caucasian Books*, *Latino Books* and *Multicultural Books* each represent the two books used in the study that fall into that respective category. African American participants selected African American books at a rate of 43.24%, and selected Caucasian books at a rate of 27.03%. African American participants selected Latino books at a rate of 18.92%, and selected Multicultural books at a rate of 10.81%. Caucasian participants selected Caucasian books at a rate of 41.18%, and selected African American

books at a rate of 29.41%. Caucasian participants selected Latino books at a rate of 27.06%, and selected Multicultural books at a rate of 2.35%. Both African American and Caucasian participants made *culturally consistent* book selections at a rate that was higher than book selections from the other three categories. The term *culturally consistent* describes participants' book selections that match the race of the respective reader. Latino students selected Latino books at a rate of 18.75%, and selected African American books at a rate of 50.00%. Latino students selected Caucasian books at a rate of 25.00%, and selected Multicultural books at a rate of 6.25%. Latino participants did not make culturally consistent book selections at a rate that was higher than book selections in the three other categories. It is possible that the number of Latino participants (n=16) may not be sufficient to accurately represent the book selections of young Latino readers. Bi-racial students selected African American books at a rate of 38.10%, and selected Caucasian books at a rate of 19.05%. Bi-racial students selected Latino books at a rate of 38.10% and selected Multicultural books at a rate of 4.76%. The current study included one Native American participant, who selected a Latino book (100%). Again, the small numbers of participants in both the Bi-racial (n=21) and Native American (n=1) groups may not be sufficient to accurately represent the book selections of these young readers.

Chi-Square tests were conducted in order to analyze the relationship between participants' race and book selections, and to address Null Hypothesis 1, which states, "African American kindergarteners will not select picture books for themselves based on multicultural content." African American, Caucasian and Latino participants were included in the Chi-Square analyses since these participants were able to make culturally consistent book selections. Bi-racial and Native American participants were not included in the Chi-

Square analyses since the books used in the study did not allow these participants to make a culturally consistent book selection. The Chi-Square test was conducted to examine the relationship between participants' race and book selections. Chi-Square tests are used to evaluate relationships between variables and provide statistical evidence, if any, regarding the presence of a relationship between those variables. For the current study, a Chi-Square output of  $p=.05$  or less would indicate a significant relationship between race and book selections, and a Chi-Square output of  $p=.05$  or higher would indicate a non-significant relationship between race and book selections. Chi-Square analyses resulted in an output of  $p=.24$ , which is higher than  $p=.05$ . The Chi-Square output does not provide statistical significance regarding the relationship between race and students' book selections. For the current study, Null Hypothesis 1 failed to be rejected.

#### *Participants' Book Selections for Peers of Similar and Different Races*

The current section reports data regarding participants' book selections for peers of similar and different races. This section also addresses Null Hypothesis 2, which states, "African American kindergarteners will not select books for peers of similar/different races based on multicultural content." Table 4.10 presents data reporting book selections by African American participants for African American peers, Table 4.11 presents data reporting book selections by African American participants for Caucasian peers, and Table 4.12 presents data reporting book selections by African American participants for Latino peers.

African American participants had the opportunity to select a book for their African American peers. For African American peers, African American books were selected at a rate of 24%, Caucasian books were selected at a rate of 40%, Latino books were selected at a

rate of 14%, and Multicultural books were selected at a rate of 22%. A Chi-Square test was conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections; and resulted in an output of  $p=.24$  (at the .05 significance level). According to the Chi-Square output, African American students did not select African American books for African American peers at a significant frequency. African American participants also had the opportunity to select books for Caucasian peers. Caucasian books were selected at a rate of 22%, African American books were selected at a rate of 29%, Latino books were selected at a rate of 38%, and Multicultural books were selected at a rate of 10%. A Chi-Square test was conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections, and resulted in an output of  $p=.29$  (at the .05 significance level). According to the Chi-Square output, African American students did not select Caucasian books for Caucasian peers at a significant frequency. Lastly, African American participants selected books for their Latino peers. Latino books were selected at a rate of 32%, African American books were selected at a rate of 16%, Caucasian books were selected at a rate of 29%, and Multicultural books were selected at a rate of 21%. A Chi-Square test was also conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections, and resulted in an output of  $p=.32$  (at the .05 significance level). According to the Chi-Square output, African American students did not select Latino books for Latino peers at a significant frequency.

In sum, African American participants did not make culturally consistent book selections for their peers of African American, Caucasian and Latino peers. In the current study, Null Hypothesis 2, which states that African American kindergarteners will not select books for peers of similar/different races based on multicultural content, failed to be rejected. Data was also collected regarding book selections of Caucasian, Latino and Bi-racial

participants for peers of similar and different races. Similar to African American participants, the other participant groups did not make culturally consistent book selections for peers. The data indicates one instance where participants made culturally consistent book selections for peers. When Caucasian students were asked to select a book for African American peers, they responded with the following selections: African American books, 36%; Caucasian books, 31%; Latino books, 22%; and Multicultural books, 9%. The Chi-Square test conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections resulted in an output of  $p=.01$  (at the .05 significance level). According to the Chi-Square output, Caucasian students did select African American books for African American peers at a significant frequency.

### Summary

The current chapter presented the results of quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted with data gathered in the current study. Results were presented in two sections. The first section presented qualitative analyses conducted to answer Research Question 1, and reported rationales for book selections of African American students in comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers. The second section of the current chapter presented data and statistics reporting book selections of all research participants. The second section also presented data from statistical analyses conducted to answer Research Question 2, and to address Null Hypotheses 1 and 2. The following chapter further discusses the study's findings, limitations associated with the study, and implications for future research and for the field of Early Childhood Education.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The current study examined book selections of economically disadvantaged African American kindergarteners. The sections below discuss the results from data gathered during the study, and address both research questions used to guide the current study. The sections below also address the limitations associated with the study, implications for future research, and implications for the field of Early Childhood Education. This chapter primarily focuses on information regarding African American and Caucasian participants. The sample sizes for the other student participants- Latino, Bi-racial, and Native American- may have been too small to accurately reflect book selection patterns within the respective group.

### Research Question 1: Rationales for Book Selections

Research Question 1 asked, “In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, how do African American kindergarteners describe book selections they make for themselves, and peers of similar/different races?” Results from qualitative analyses were used to answer the above stated research question. Qualitative analyses presented seven themes describing participants’ rationales for book selections, including Story Elements, Cultural Content, Book Elements, Character Elements, External Influences, Prior Knowledge, and Random. The majority of students’ comments were related to the themes of Story Content, Cultural Content, and Book Content; and the following discussion primarily focuses on those themes. Some discussion will be dedicated to the remaining themes of Character Elements, External Influences, Prior Knowledge, and Random.

### *Story Elements*

Story Elements were the most common explanations given by the kindergarten participants as rationales for book selections. Twelve open codes were grouped under the axial code Story Elements: Boy Books, Dancing, Fiction, Funny/Humor, Girl Book, Good Story, Language/Words, Music, Non-Fiction, Rhyme, Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations, and Surprise/Suspense. Several of the responses categorized under the theme Story Elements are similar to information found in prior book selection studies conducted with younger readers. The themes Boy Books and Girl Books were present in the current study. Prior book selection studies have often cited gender preferences as an explanation for students' book selections. Prior studies suggest that male and female readers are both inclined towards certain topics and subject matter (Barrs & Pidgeon, 1994; Fairleigh et al., 1974; Henry, 1992; Simpson, 1996), and that both genders prefer same-gender protagonists (Beyard-Tyler & Sullivan, 1980; Johnson et al., 1984; Lowther & Sullivan, 1993). These prior findings were similar to information gathered during the current study, as several students indicated that a certain book was more suitable for a specific gender to read based on the book's content, characters or illustrations. The themes Fiction and Non-Fiction were present in the current study, as several students commented on the presence of fiction and non-fiction material in a book's story content and/or illustrations. Prior studies have well-documented book selections based on genre preferences. Studies with elementary-age readers have shown both preferences for fiction and non-fiction literature (Doiron, 2003; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Henry, 1992; Mohr, 2003; Mohr, 2006; Simpson, 1996; Wiberg & Trost, 1970; Zimet & Camp, 1974). The current study found similar results regarding rationales for book selections that are related to Fiction and Non-Fiction, and suggests that



younger readers have interest in both fiction and non-fiction content in children's picture books.

The theme Surprise/Suspense was present in the current study. Students commented on story content that they found surprising, suspenseful, or a bit scary. Prior studies suggest that suspenseful or surprising information in reading materials tends to elicit a more intense "interest response" from both adult and school-age readers (Bower, 1982; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981, 1982; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Findings from the current study support the idea that younger readers' book selections may be influenced by book content that they find surprising, scary, or suspenseful. Also, the theme Language/Words was a rationale for participants' book selections in the current study, and is a theme that is similar to findings in prior book selection studies with younger readers. All books used in the current study were age-appropriate in terms of reading level, comprehension level, and vocabulary. Participants made numerous comments regarding how they liked the words in the books, how the words were easy to read, and how the words gave meaning to the story. Prior research regarding book selections and reading trends of younger readers suggests that certain textual features such as having complete meaning on a one- or two-page spread in a book, or having familiar and age-appropriate vocabulary can attract younger readers (King, 1967; Lysaker, 1997; Nodelman, 1988; Peterson, 1991; Reutzel & Gali, 1998). Prior research also suggests that a particularly interesting choice of words may cause increased reader interest and increased enjoyment of reading (Holmes et al., 2007). Findings from the current study may support the indication that younger readers may be attracted to books with age-appropriate and interesting language. Lastly, participants in the current study made a few comments indicating Rhyme as a reason for enjoying and selecting a particular book. Prior research

indicates that rhyme may be an aspect of books that influences book selections and reselections of younger readers (Nodelman, 1988). Findings from the current study are similar to these previous findings regarding the presence of rhyme in children's picture books.

The most common rationales for book selections categorized under the theme Story Elements were described as Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations. Minimal information can be found in prior book selection studies regarding how students recalled story events, with or without picture cues from illustrations, when giving explanations for book selections. The majority of prior book selection studies, however, did not interview students regarding book selections from books that had been read aloud to them. The majority of studies employed data collection strategies such as investigating classroom and school library records; interviewing or surveying teachers, parents or librarians; asking students to choose from a pre-arranged checklist why they chose certain books; or recording book selections of younger readers without asking for rationales explaining those selections. The current study interviewed each participant regarding rationales for book selections, and overwhelmingly garnered responses falling under the category Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations. This finding suggests that while many factors are at play during book selection, the actual story content may be a very important reason explaining young readers' book selections. Further investigation is needed to investigate the influence of story content on book selections of younger readers.

#### *Cultural Content*

Cultural Content stands as the second most common explanations for book selections of the kindergarten participants in the current study. Seven open codes were included under

Cultural Content: Cool, Dancing, Racial/Cultural Identity, Hip Hop, Language/Words, Music and Windows. The majority of the findings categorized under the theme Cultural Content are new information regarding book selections of kindergarten students, and African American kindergarten students. Most prior book selection studies with younger readers did not interview participants, did not ask questions regarding multicultural content, and most of the studies did not include significant numbers of minority students. The current study specifically sought information on the influence of multicultural content on book selections of younger readers in an effort to contribute new information to the body of knowledge regarding book selections of African American kindergarten students.

African American participants often commented on Language/Words from the book *Yo Jo*, which is a book that uses “urban” language common in many African American homes and communities. Many of the African American participants recalled specific phrases from the book, described how the language in the book is similar to language spoken in their homes and amongst their family members, and many offered translations for the words and phrases present in *Yo Jo*. Many of the African American students realized that the language from *Yo Jo* was not standard, or mainstream, English. During interviews, the African American participants went into great detail regarding the language from *Yo Jo*, in comparison to the other participants in the study; and African American students did not offer many comments on the language from the other picture books used in the current study. Based on the frequent responses from African American participants regarding Language/Words from *Yo Jo*, it can be suggested that language which matches the reader’s culture may be an important influence on book selections. Another indication that language matching the reader’s culture may influence book selections is the fact that African American

participants made numerous comments regarding Latino readers and books containing Spanish language. Many African American students selected Spanish books for Latino readers and commented that the Latino readers would enjoy a book that has Spanish language. This finding also suggests that books with language matching a reader's culture may influence students' book selections.

African American participants also selected books for peers of similar and different races based on similarities in physical appearance. Interviewing data presented numerous comments regarding book selections based on the fact that the reader had physical similarities to the depictions in a particular picture book. Students commented on similarities in skin color, hair style and facial features. This information suggests that depictions of characters having similarities to the race of the reader may have an influence on book selections. Prior studies examining reading interests of younger African American readers have also discussed the influence of character depictions on reading interest and book selections of these readers. The ability for younger readers to identify with characters, or character identification, may be an influence on book selections of younger African American readers (Galda et al., 2001) and also an influence on their ability to engage in a book (Hilgard, 1974; Langer, 1990). Character identification may be influenced by characteristics such as the race, gender, physical depiction and economic status of the characters present in the book (Brooks & McNair, 2009; Huck & Keifer, 2004). The current study documented several comments from African American participants related to physical depiction of characters, and similarities in the physical appearance of the characters to themselves or peers. This may be an indication that depictions in a book, and depictions that are similar to the reader, may be an influence on book selections in younger readers.

Teachers can use information regarding the possible influence of similarities in physical depictions as they consider literature choices for their students. Teachers need to make sure the books in their classrooms reflect the physical depictions of all the students with regard to characteristics such as race, gender, hairstyle, size and ability. Teachers also need to make sure the books in their classrooms show positive images reflecting the diversity of the students, as research indicates that the depiction of characters may have an impact on the self esteem and self image of younger readers (Bishop, 1990; Grice & Vaughn, 1992; Hittleman, 1978; Lehr & Thompson, 2000; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992).

Several African American students commented on the “high five” gesture that was depicted in the book *Yo Jo*; and described how they use the “high five” gesture amongst friends and family members. This finding suggests that books containing activities similar to those conducted with members of a particular race may have an influence on book selections.

Caucasian participants also offered comments regarding Language/Words from the study’s books, comments regarding the book *Yo Jo*, and comments on Spanish language used in the study’s books. Many of the Caucasian participants also selected books with Spanish language for their Latino peers. One finding with Caucasian participants was notably original in comparison to findings for the other participants in the current study. Caucasian participants frequently offered rationales for book selections that were based on diversity present in the physical appearance of book’s characters. Also, during book selections, Caucasian students largely selected books for peers based on similarities in physical appearance. These results suggest that Caucasian students may notice diversity and differences in books, and should be included in conversations regarding multicultural literature for younger readers. The majority of literature that discusses the importance of and the benefits of multicultural literature for

younger readers primarily focuses on racial minority groups. Perhaps multicultural literature is as important for Caucasian readers as for non-Caucasian readers. The findings in the current study demonstrate a need for further examination into why Caucasian kindergarteners are frequently making book selections and giving rationales for book selections that are related to diversity.

Overall, many participants in the current study noted Cultural Content as a rationale for selecting certain books; however, Story Content ranked highest among the seven themes representing students' responses. Based on the results of the current study, it can be suggested that quality multicultural picture books not only contain cultural content, but have quality stories and quality illustrations (Boyd, 2002, 2006; Copenhaver, 2001; Harris, 1995; Lee, 1993; 2006; Sipe & Daley, 2005). Along with cultural content, the book's story content, illustrations, theme and plot may all need to be written in a quality manner in order to positively influence book selections of younger readers.

### *Book Elements*

Information describing book selections based on physical book characteristics is a widely researched area regarding book selections of younger readers. Eleven open codes were grouped under Book Elements: Award Winner, Book Cover, Book Size or Shape, Illustrations, Illustrations: Colors, Length, Letters, New Book/Never Read Before, Page Layout, Pretty/Beautiful, and Title. Prior book selection studies offer a wide array of information regarding the influence of physical book characteristics on the book selections of younger readers. The current study also found plentiful information regarding the influence of Book Elements on book selections of younger readers. Participants commented on Illustrations, Illustrations: Colors, Book Cover, Title, and the aesthetic quality of the book-

Pretty/Beautiful. Prior research touches on all of the above stated physical book characteristics, and suggests that these are important elements to younger readers when selecting books. Physical book characteristics such as the title, illustrations, cover illustrations, size and thickness can influence readers, and attract or dissuade readers from selecting a particular book to read (Fleener et al., 1997; Greenlaw & Wielan, 1979; Lawson, 1972; Mohr, 2003; Peterson, 1971; Stewig, 1972). Younger readers often select books based upon the book's cover (Nodelman, 1988; Wexner, 1954), and children's book authors/illustrators frequently use vivid, colorful cover and book illustrations designed to attract readers' interest (Au et al., 1992; Hoffman et al., 1993; Holmes et al., 2007). The findings from the current study are similar to findings from prior book selection studies.

Results from the current study outlined comments regarding Book Size/Shape, as some participants indicated these features influenced their book selections. Prior studies have documented similar findings when evaluating book selections of younger readers. Most readers, especially younger readers, are influenced by the physical appearance of a book, before and after the book's reading (Huck & Kiefer, 2004; Nodelman, 1988). The size, shape or thickness of a book can signify certain expectations before reading (Huck & Kiefer, 2004; Nodelman, 1988), and can sustain interest for continued or subsequent readings. Very small or large books are generally expected to be for younger readers, and often contain simple vocabulary and illustrations appropriate for pre-readers (Nodelman, 1988). Another finding from the current study that is similar to findings from prior book selection studies is the influence of certain textual features in books. Participants in the study indicated that the appearance of the Letters in the study's books was an influence on book selection. Many students commented on the color of the letters, the font and size used, and the spacing

associated with the letters. Prior studies suggest that text features of frequently- selected student books reveal the following predominant features: large print and fonts that resemble standard print (King, 1967; Lysaker, 1997; Nodelman, 1988; Peterson, 1991; Reutzel & Gali, 1998).

The current study also found that the books' Length was a rationale for students' book selections. Several students mentioned that the books were "not too short" and "not too long." This finding suggests that for younger readers there are books that may be too short, and books that may be too long to capture and hold their attention. Prior research indicates that books that are too short are often considered "baby books" by some elementary readers (Nodelman, 1988). A suggestion that may be drawn based on this finding from the current study is that younger readers may be drawn towards books that are not too short as to insult their intelligence, but not too long as to exceed their attention spans and comprehension levels. Lastly, participants in the current study noted a book being an Award Winner as a rationale for book selections. Minimal prior research documents the influence of a book bearing the seal of an award as an explanation for book selections; however, findings in the current study indicate that a book being an Award Winner may influence students' book selections, particularly if the teacher emphasizes that the book won an award.

#### *Character Elements, External Influences, Prior Knowledge and Random*

The next section discusses findings related to the themes Character Elements, External Influences, Prior Knowledge and Random rationales for book selections of kindergarten students. Participants offered rationales regarding Characters as explanations for book selections, stating that they liked the presence or the appearance of the characters. This particular rationale was not an overwhelmingly common response for book selections, and



ranked fourth among the rationales given for book selections of the kindergarten participants. Regarding African American participants, some researchers suggest that a key influence on reading interest among African American readers may be character identification (Galda et al., 2001), which can influence the extent to which a reader is able to engage in a book (Hilgard, 1974; Langer, 1990). Prior research suggests that character identification can be influenced by factors such as race, gender, physical description or economic status of characters (Brooks & McNair, 2009; Huck & Kiefer, 2004). The findings from the current study do not significantly report responses related to characters as rationales for book selections; however, character identification may have some influence on book selections of younger readers.

The results of qualitative analyses report External Influences as rationales for students' book selections. Some students commented on outside influences such as teachers, peers and family members, or influences such as the Internet, television, and other media targeting younger age groups. Several studies document external influences on book selections of younger readers. Family members, friends and peers play a key role in recommending books to young readers, and influencing book selections of younger readers (Carter, 1988; Casteneda, 1995; Fleener et al., 1997; Henry, 1992; Jenkins, 1955; Kragler, 2000; Timion, 1992; Wendelin & Zinck, 1988). Reading interests and reading motivation can be significantly affected by the influence of teachers, peers, family members, and particularly mothers; students often select and read books they would not otherwise encounter based on recommendations or actual selections of these individuals (Mohr, 2006; Wendelin & Zinck, 1988). Findings from the current study support the idea that other individuals can have an influence on younger readers' book selections. Research also exists specifically documenting

the influence of media on students' book selections. For example, Williams (2008) concluded from a book selection study featuring all African American students, that the mass media and other individuals can have an influence on students' book selections. Again, findings from the current study support the idea that External Influences and the Media may affect students' book selections.

Prior Knowledge, which includes having read the book previously, or having previous experiences associated with the book's content, can influence students' book selections according to results from the current study. The theme Prior Knowledge did not rank very high in the current study, however, prior studies investigating book selections of younger readers document the influence of Prior Knowledge, or book content being familiar to students, as an influence on students' book selections (Berlyne, 1974; Kintsch, 1980). Other studies suggest that the interaction of familiar and new content can create reading interest for young readers (Hidi et al., 1982; Schank, 1979).

Results indicate that the least common rationale for students' book selections for the current study fall under the category of Random. The theme Random included rationales for book selections that were not related to the book, or when students gave no responses to interview questions. Currently, prior studies do not document random explanations as rationales for book selections of younger readers. Two suggestions may be made from the presence of Random comments as explanations for students' book selections. First, some kindergarten students may not have the level of cognitive activity, comprehension or vocabulary to be able to articulate explanations for book selections. And second, there may be a portion of younger readers who actually select books randomly, without regard to the book's content or the seven themes discovered through the current study.

## Research Question 2: Book Selections of Kindergarten Students

### *Null Hypothesis 1: African American Kindergarteners' Book Selections for Themselves*

Research Question 2 asked, “In comparison to their Caucasian and Latino peers, do African American kindergarteners select books based on multicultural content?” Two null hypotheses were formulated to examine the relationship between book selections and the race of the reader. Null Hypothesis 1 states, “African American kindergarteners will not select picture books for themselves based on multicultural content.” In the current study, African American participants selected African American books at a rate of 43.24%, Caucasian participants selected Caucasian books at a rate of 41.18%, and Latino students selected Latino books at a rate of 18.75%. A Chi-Square test was conducted to examine the relationship between participants’ race and book selections. Chi-Square tests are used to evaluate relationships between variables, and provide statistical evidence, if any, regarding the presence of a relationship between those variables. For the current study, a Chi-Square output of  $p=.05$  or less would indicate a significant relationship between race and book selections, and would allow the null hypothesis to be rejected. A Chi-Square output of  $p=.05$  or higher indicates a non-significant relationship between race and book selections, and would result in failure to reject the null hypothesis. The Chi-Square test conducted to analyze the relationship between participants’ race and book selections resulted in an output of  $p=.24$ . Since  $p=.24$  is higher than  $p=.05$ , the Chi-Square output indicates that there is no statistical significance regarding the idea that students will select books with content that matches the reader’s race. As a result, Null Hypothesis 1 failed to be rejected.

The current study set out to discover more information regarding book selection patterns of African American kindergarten students, and the initial assumption was that African American kindergarteners would be more inclined to select books with African American content. Statistical analyses of students' book selections did not indicate a significant relationship between race and book selections with African American readers, however, the current study does report culturally consistent book selections at a rate of over 40% among the African American and Caucasian participants. This finding indicates that the relationship between book selections and race may need further examination. Research indicates that when given the choice, students would select specific categories of books by chance at a rate of 25% (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000), since participants were able to make book selections from four categories of books, including African American, Caucasian, Latino and Multicultural. African American students selected African American books at a rate of 43.24%, and Caucasian students selected Caucasian books at a rate of 41.18%. The data shows that over 40% of African American and Caucasian students made culturally consistent book selections. Prior book selection studies report that there is no relationship between race and book selections of African American readers (Asher, 1979; Holmes et al., 2007), however the fact that participants in the study made culturally consistent book selections at a rate higher than 25% may be an indication that the relationship between race and book selection still needs further investigation. Results from qualitative data analyses also suggest that the relationship between race and book selections may need further examination. According to information gathered during qualitative analyses, African American, Caucasian and Bi-racial participants gave rationales for book selections that were related to Cultural Content as the second most popular rationales for book selections.

Rationales related to Cultural Content accounted for 18% of African American participants' rationales, 18% for Caucasian rationales, and 20% for Bi-racial participants. Latino participants ranked Cultural Content as their third most popular rationales for book selections, at a rate of 13%. All participant groups ranked Story Elements as their most common rationales for book selections. The data reported indicates that while Cultural Content may not be the most popular rationales for book selections, it may be an influence regarding book selections of kindergarten students that needs further examination.

Another suggestion to be made based on both the qualitative and quantitative results of the current study is that quality multicultural picture books may not only contain cultural content, but also have quality stories and quality illustrations (Boyd, 2002, 2006; Copenhaver, 2001; Harris, 1995; Lee, 1993; 2006; Sipe & Daley, 2005). Several participants in the current study noted Cultural Content as a rationale for selecting certain books, however, Story Content ranked highest among the seven themes representing students' responses. It can be suggested that while the presence of cultural content may be important to younger readers, it is not the only aspect of picture books that influences these readers. Along with cultural content, the book's story content, illustrations, theme and plot may all need to be written in a quality manner in order to create and sustain interest in younger readers.

With African American participants in the current study, the second most frequent books selected were Caucasian books, and with Caucasian participants, the second most frequent books selected were African American books. African American participants selected Caucasian books at a rate of 27%, and Caucasian participants selected African American books at a rate of 29%. These book selections may support the idea of *windows* and *mirrors* regarding children's literature. Researchers suggest that multicultural literature

can serve as a *window* or *mirror* to a particular culture (Bishop, 1990; Hopson & Hopson, 1993; Katz, 1983; Mohr, 2006; Ramsey, 1987; Rudman, 1984). Books depicting a culture different from the reader can provide a literary experience with another culture (Bishop, 1990; Galda, 1998; Hittleman, 1978; Sipe, 1999), and books reflecting the culture of the reader can provide a positive and oftentimes more meaningful literary experience. In the three elementary schools where data collection took place, the majority of the student populations were made up of African American and Caucasian students. Representation amongst the Latino, Bi-racial and Native American participants was not significant. Knowing the racial make-up of the elementary schools that participated in the study, it can be suggested that the racial group that is second most familiar to African American students is Caucasian, and the racial group that is second most familiar to Caucasian students is African American. Data from the current study demonstrates that with African American participants, the second most frequent books selected were Caucasian books, and with Caucasian participants, the second most frequent books selected were African American books. The data suggests that student participants may have made these respective book selections based on the idea that it offered a *window* into a culture very close to their own.

*Null Hypothesis 2: African American Kindergarteners' Book Selections for Peers*

Null Hypothesis 2 states, "African American kindergarteners will not select books for peers of similar and different races based on multicultural content." In the current study, African American participants had the opportunity to select a book for African American, Caucasian, and Latino peers. For African American peers, African American books were selected at a rate of 24%, Caucasian books were selected at a rate of 40%, Latino books were selected at a rate of 14%, and Multicultural books were selected at a rate of 22%. A Chi-

Square test was conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections made for peers by African American participants. Chi-Square analyses resulted in an output of  $p=.24$  (at the .05 significance level). For the current study, a Chi-Square output of  $p=.05$  or less indicates a significant relationship between race and book selections, and a Chi-Square output of  $p=.05$  or higher indicates a non-significant relationship between race and book selections. According to the Chi-Square output of  $p=.24$ , African American students did not select African American books for African American peers at a significant frequency. The Chi-Square output of  $p=.24$  does not provide statistical significance regarding the relationship between race and book selections of kindergarten readers.

African American participants also had the opportunity to select books for Caucasian peers. Caucasian books were selected at a rate of 22%, African American books were selected at a rate of 29%, Latino books were selected at a rate of 38%, and Multicultural books were selected at a rate of 10%. A Chi-Square test was conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections, and resulted in an output of  $p=.29$  (at the .05 significance level). The Chi-Square output is not less than  $p=.05$ , which demonstrates that African American students did not select Caucasian books for Caucasian peers at a significant frequency. Lastly, African American participants selected books for their Latino peers. Latino books were selected at a rate of 32%, African American books were selected at a rate of 16%, Caucasian books were selected at a rate of 29%, and Multicultural books were selected at a rate of 21%. A Chi-Square test was also conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections, and resulted in an output of  $p=.32$  (at the .05 significance level). According to the Chi-Square output, African American students did not select Latino books for Latino peers at a statistically significant frequency. The results for Null Hypothesis

2 are similar to results for Null Hypothesis 1. Both results failed to find a statistically significant relationship between book selections and the reader's race.

Overall, African American participants did not make culturally consistent book selections for their peers of African American, Caucasian and Latino peers. In the current study, Null Hypothesis 2, which states that African American kindergarteners will not select books for peers of similar/different races based on multicultural content, failed to be rejected.

Data was also analyzed regarding book selections of Caucasian, Latino and Bi-racial participants for peers of similar and different races. Similar to African American participants, the other participant groups did not make culturally consistent book selections for peers, except for one instance. The data indicates one instance where participants made culturally consistent book selections for peers at a significant rate. When Caucasian students were asked to select a book for African American peers, they responded with the following selections: African American books, 36%; Caucasian books, 31%; Latino books, 22%; and Multicultural books, 9%. The Chi-Square test conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections resulted in an output of  $p=.01$  (at the .05 significance level). The Chi-Square output is less than  $p=.05$ , which indicates a significant relationship between the variables of race and book selections. The Chi-Square output demonstrates that Caucasian students did select African American books for African American peers at a significant frequency. As previously stated, this result suggests that Caucasian students may need to be included in conversations regarding multicultural literature for younger readers. The majority of literature discussing the importance of and the benefits of multicultural literature for younger readers focuses on racial minority groups. Perhaps multicultural literature is as important for Caucasian readers as for non-Caucasian readers. The findings in the current



study demonstrate a need for further inquiry in order to examine why Caucasian kindergarteners are frequently giving rationales for book selections that are related to diversity.

### Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Employing multiple data collection strategies during research inquiries can increase reliability and validity of research (Glesne, 2002; Lincoln, 1985). Using multiple data sources often allows researchers to gather a more complete picture of the phenomena being studied (Gay et al., 2006; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). The current study employed the data collection strategies of book selection and student interviews in order to gather more information regarding book selections of kindergarten readers. There were several instances where information from both analyses of both data collection strategies did overlap to suggest similar ideas regarding book selections of African American and Caucasian readers. Results from analyses of both qualitative and quantitative data from Caucasian readers suggest that multicultural content and diversity may be influences on the book selections of these younger readers. During interviews with Caucasian participants, students frequently offered rationales for book selections that were based on diversity present in the physical appearance of a book's characters. And during book selections, Caucasian students largely selected books for peers based on similarities in physical appearance. Results from quantitative analyses found that Caucasian book selections for African American peers was the only category of book selections that resulted in a significant outcome from Chi-Square analyses, specifically  $p=.01$  (at the .05 significance level). Results from interviews and book selections both suggest that Caucasian students may have been influenced by multicultural content when making book selections.

Results from both qualitative and quantitative data analyses also indicate that the relationship between race and book selections may need further examination. According to information gathered during qualitative analyses, African American, Caucasian and Bi-racial participants gave rationales for book selections that were related to Cultural Content as the second most popular rationales for book selections. Rationales related to Cultural Content accounted for 18% of African American participants' rationales, 18% for Caucasian rationales, and 20% for Bi-racial participants. Latino participants ranked Cultural Content as their third most popular rationales for book selections, at a rate of 13%. Quantitative analyses did not result in an output indicating statistical significance regarding the relationship between race and book selections, however, both African American and Caucasian participants made culturally consistent book selections at a rate that was higher than random selection, which was 25% for the current study. African American students selected African American books at a rate of 43.24%, and Caucasian students selected Caucasian books at a rate of 41.18%. Over 40% of African American and Caucasian students made culturally consistent book selections. These results present evidence suggesting that multicultural content may have some influence on students book selections, and the relationship between race and book selections may need further examination.

### Summary

The above sections discussed conclusions related to themes found during quantitative and qualitative analyses of information gathered in the current study. The current study gathered much information regarding students' book selections that were similar to prior book selection studies, and also discovered new information regarding book selections of younger readers. The sections below go further to discuss limitations associated with the

current study, implications for future research, and implications for the field of Early Childhood Education.

### Limitations

The present section discusses potential limitations associated with the current study. The limitations are specifically related to student data, time limitations, the participant sample, and teacher fidelity.

#### *Student Data*

A potential limitation associated with the current study was the restricted access to student data for the individuals who participated in the study. The study focused on economically-disadvantaged students, however, there was no access to data specifying the socioeconomic status of individual student participants. The study took place with students in economically-disadvantaged schools that reported high rates of students receiving free and reduced lunches; however, it was not possible to evaluate the socio-economic background of individual students. Since the three schools involved in the study reported rates of free/reduced lunches at over 70%, it was assumed that the majority of the students who participated in the study came from lower economic backgrounds. However, specific information regarding students' socioeconomic backgrounds was not available for the current study.

#### *Time Limitations*

Another limitation was the time frame in which data collection took place. Due to the large number of classrooms participating in the study, the time spent in each classroom prior to data collection was limited. *Prolonged engagement* is the strategy of spending time in the research environment in order to learn the culture and build trust among research participants

(Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Lincoln, 1985). Each class was visited at least once prior to data collection. In each classroom, a group circle-time activity was conducted, introductions were made, and an explanation was given regarding my presence in the classroom. Visits were concluded with the reading of a storybook not associated with the study (Christelow, 1992). Ideally, the researcher would have spent several days or even several weeks in each classroom prior to data collection, however time constraints did not permit that to occur.

### *Participant Sample*

Data collection took place in a rural county in North Carolina. Due to the demographics of the student population in this rural county, the numbers of research participants for each racial group used in the study were significantly uneven. The study utilized a total of 160 students: African American, 37; Caucasian, 85; Latino, 16; Bi-racial, 21; and Native American, 1. For the purposes of the qualitative analyses, a portion of the interviews from Caucasian students were excluded through random selection in order to establish more balanced numbers amongst the racial groups included in the study. The total number of participants included during qualitative analyses came to a total of 122 students. Ideally, the participant sample would have contained more balanced numbers amongst the different groups; higher numbers of African American, Latino and Bi-racial students, and students from other racial groups such as Asian or Multi-racial.

The majority of Latino students who participated in the study were English Language Learners and had limited abilities with comprehending and speaking the English language. This detail may have affected the quality and depth of information received from this group of students during interviews. Also, the age of the participant sample could have presented limitations regarding the quality and depth of information received during interviews. The

students utilized in the study were kindergarten students, ages four to six, and it is possible that their level of comprehension and language development may have impeded the quality of answers given during interviews. Future studies may consider increasing the age or grade level of the participants in an effort to gather richer, more detailed and more specific information.

### *Teacher Fidelity*

Teacher fidelity may have been a limitation to the current study. Prior to data collection, all participating teachers were given a set of eight picture books to place in the classroom library; however it was not possible to verify that all eight picture books were consistently in the classroom library and assessable to all students. Teachers were asked to read the eight picture books prior to data collection, and were given a checklist to record and monitor readings. However, it was not possible to verify that all books had been read to students. During the study, after completing student interviews within one classroom, the classroom teacher admitted that she had forgotten to read one of the books associated with the current study, *Jazz Baby*. There may have been other teachers participating in the study who did not read all eight books to their students.

Another limitation may have been the manner in which teachers read the eight picture books to students. Teachers were instructed to read all books to students in the same manner, with enthusiasm and intonation (Heath, 1982; Morrow, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1987), and without the use of props. Teachers were also asked to refrain from conducting classroom activities associated with the eight picture books until after data collection. However, it was not possible to monitor or verify the manner in which participating teachers actually read the books to students.

## Implications for Future Research

The results of the current study provide several implications for future research regarding book selections of younger readers. The implications are presented in the section below in four key areas: research participants, steps to address concerns with teacher fidelity, conducting interviews with younger individuals, and further investigation of the role of race in students' book selections.

### *Research Participants*

The numbers of participants in the different racial groups for the current study was uneven, and did not contain high numbers of Latino and Bi-racial student participants. The three elementary schools where data collection took place had student populations with uneven numbers amongst the different racial groups. Future research may need to be conducted in a location that provides a participant sample with more balanced numbers amongst the different racial groups, and larger numbers of students of color. The current study included 16 Latino students, 21 Bi-racial students, and one Native American student. During analyses, the numbers of Latino, Bi-racial and Native American participants may not have been sufficient to accurately represent the book selections of these younger readers. Ideally, each racial group included in the study should have equal representation regarding sample sizes.

The schools where data collection took place also provided a student population with limited diversity. The present study included Caucasian, African American, Latino, Bi-racial and Native American students. It is important for researchers to examine and be aware of book selection patterns of a wide variety of students, and future research should take steps to include more student groups in the participant sample. Students from different races, diverse

language backgrounds, and also diverse abilities may be considered as participants for future research.

### *Teacher Fidelity*

Future studies may consider standardizing the manner in which books are presented and read to students. Prior to data collection in the present study, teachers were instructed to read all books to students in the same manner, with enthusiasm and intonation (Heath, 1982; Morrow, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1987), and without the use of props. However, it was not possible to verify or monitor the manner in which teachers presented and read books to students. A possible solution to standardizing the manner in which books are presented and read to students is including the use of video technology in the study. Either the researcher or an adult volunteer would make video recordings for each book associated with the study. In videos, each book would be introduced to students in the same manner, with the same aspects being emphasized such as the front cover, title page, author and illustrator. In videos, books would be read by the same person in the same manner and without the use of props. With the use of video technology, teacher responsibility with the study would decrease. Teachers would only be responsible for showing each video to the class, and keeping the books in the classroom library and assessable to students during the instructional day. Another idea for standardizing the way in which books are presented and read to students is arranging for the principle researcher to be responsible for reading all books to student participants. There are several ways researchers could standardize the reading and presentation of books to students, all of which may decrease limitations associated with teacher fidelity.

### *Conducting Interviews with Younger Individuals*

The current study employed the data collection strategy of participant interviews, in addition to book selections, in order to gather more information regarding influences on book selections of younger readers. Many of the prior studies examining book selections of younger readers did not utilize interviews as a method to gather information from the students. Many studies employed data collection strategies including examining book circulation records, observing students during library or classroom activities, or administering surveys and checklists. Prior studies have also gathered information regarding reading behaviors and book selections of younger readers by interviewing parents, teachers and librarians. The current study found information regarding book selections of younger readers that has not been widely documented in prior studies. Perhaps an explanation for this occurrence is that the participants were able to engage in interviews designed to gather more information regarding rationales for their book selections.

Interviewing younger individuals can have benefits, but can also present challenges and difficulties not applicable when interviewing older individuals (Aubrey et al., 2002). Information regarding qualitative research with preschoolers and younger elementary students has documented potential limitations associated with interviewing these younger individuals. Younger students often have developing language and cognitive abilities (Chomsky, 1972; Piaget, 1978; Vygotsky, 1984), shorter attention spans (Aubrey et al., 2002), and varying levels of comfortability with working with adult researchers (Glesne, 2006; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Lincoln, 1985). Interviewing younger children may require more time, patience and verbal repetition in comparison to interviewing older individuals (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 1995). Despite the potential challenges that



may be associated with interviewing younger individuals, interviewing may be a data collection strategy that allows researchers to gather valuable information regarding the phenomenon being studied. Some of the information gathered in the current study regarding rationales for book selections has not been previously documented in prior book selection studies. For example, the participants offered several rationales for book selections that were categorized as Cultural Content, including comments related to similarities and differences in physical appearance, and the language and dialect spoken by the characters. Another frequent response from participants was Story Recall with or without the Assistance of Illustrations, which is a rationale that has not been widely documented in prior book selection studies. Perhaps the current study was able to gather less documented information regarding book selections of younger readers as a result of utilizing the data collection strategy of participant interviews. As the principal investigator, I suggest that the valuable information received from student interviews is worth the time and effort necessary to conduct the interviews. Individuals planning to conduct future research with younger individuals can use the information from the current study regarding interviews with younger individuals when considering data collection strategies to use in their study.

#### *Relationship between Race and Book Selections*

Results from quantitative and qualitative analyses of information gathered in the current study suggest that future research is needed to investigate the relationship between race and book selections. In the current study, African American students selected African American books at a rate of 43.24%, and Caucasian students selected Caucasian books at a rate of 41.18%. While the Chi-Square output of  $p=.24$  (at the .05 significance level) does not suggest statistical significance regarding a relationship between book selections and race, the

data show that over 40% of African American and Caucasian students made culturally consistent book selections in comparison to books selected from other categories. Prior book selection studies report that there is no relationship between race and book selections of African American readers (Asher, 1979; Holmes et al., 2007), however the data gathered in the current study demonstrates that participants made culturally consistent book selections at a rate that was higher than random selection, or 25%. The data reported through the current study may be an indication that the relationship between book selections and race still needs further examination.

Results from the present study also report one instance where participants made culturally consistent book selections for peers. When Caucasian students were asked to select a book for African American peers, they responded with the following selections: African American books, 36%; Caucasian books, 31%; Latino books, 22%; and Multicultural books, 9%. The Chi-Square test conducted to analyze the relationship between race and book selections resulted in an output of  $p=.01$  (at the .05 significance level). According to the Chi-Square output, Caucasian students did select African American books for African American peers at a significant frequency. These results suggest that Caucasian students may need to be included in conversations regarding multicultural literature for younger readers. The majority of literature discussing the importance of and the benefits of multicultural literature for younger readers focuses on racial minority groups. Perhaps multicultural literature is as important for Caucasian readers as for non-Caucasian readers. The findings in the current study demonstrate a need for further inquiry into the relationship between race and book selections with younger Caucasian readers.

Results from qualitative data analyses also indicate that the relationship between race and book selections may need further examination. According to information gathered during qualitative analyses, African American, Caucasian and Bi-racial participants gave rationales for book selections that were related to Cultural Content as the second most popular rationales for book selections, and Latino participants ranked Cultural Content as their third most popular rationales for book selections. All participant groups ranked Story Elements as their most common rationales for book selections. The described data suggests that Cultural Content may have an influence on students' book selections and may need further examination.

#### Implications for the Field of Early Childhood Education

Results from the current study present several implications for the field of Early Childhood Education. The sections below discuss providing quality multicultural literature for younger readers, and implications in the areas of pre-service and in-service teacher education.

##### *Providing Younger Readers with Quality Multicultural Literature*

Teachers and early childhood professionals can use information from the current study, and prior book selection studies with younger readers, as they strive to provide quality multicultural literature for younger readers. Prior research and results from the present study suggest that quality multicultural picture books may not only contain cultural content, but have quality stories and quality illustrations (Boyd, 2002, 2006; Copenhaver, 2001; Harris, 1995; Lee, 1993, 2006; Sipe & Daley, 2005). Several participants in the current study noted Cultural Content as a rationale for selecting certain books, however, Story Content ranked highest among the seven themes representing students' responses. It can be suggested that

while the presence of cultural content is important to younger readers, it is not enough. Along with the cultural content, the book's story content, illustrations, theme and plot, all need to be written in a quality manner in order to create and sustain interest for younger readers.

Professionals in the field of early childhood education, and adults who are responsible for providing literature for younger readers need to be aware of the qualities of good multicultural literature so that they may provide this literature to younger readers. Prior to data collection, during the formulation of the book set to be used with the current study, it was extremely difficult to find quality books containing African American, Latino, and Multicultural content. Much time and effort was spent sifting through books that contained depictions representing different races, but did not contain quality story elements such as the language, plot or illustrations. In the body of children's literature, there are numerous books that may initially appear to be quality multicultural literature because they depict racial minority groups, but further investigation of the book's story elements may reveal otherwise. Early childhood professionals and adults responsible for providing literature to younger readers need to be aware that it may take more time and effort to find quality multicultural picture books for younger readers. Early childhood professionals, including teachers and librarians, also need to be cognizant that regarding multicultural picture books, you can't judge a book by its cover; that further examination of the story elements may be necessary in order to verify that the book is a quality literature selection.

#### *Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Education*

Results from the present study and information gathered in prior book selection studies contain information regarding influences on book selections of younger readers. Pre-service and in-service teachers should have opportunities to participate in training in order to

be aware of how their future and current students select books to read during opportunities for voluntary reading. Research regarding book selections of younger readers informs us that younger readers may be inclined towards certain books based on gender preferences, genre preferences, the influence of other individuals, and the influence of the media. Research also informs us that younger readers may be influenced by story elements, cultural content, physical book characteristics, and character elements. This information pertaining to influences on book selections of younger readers needs to be disseminated to pre-service and in-service teachers so they may be able to make wiser and more effective choices regarding literature provided to their students. Pre-service teachers should have opportunities at the university level to enroll in classes specifically designed to educate rising professionals regarding providing quality literature to pre-school and elementary students. Early Childhood Education programs at the university level that do not offer coursework dedicated to educating pre-service teachers on providing quality children's literature should consider doing so. In-service teachers should also have opportunities for professional development related to providing quality literature to their current students. Pre-school and elementary teachers should have opportunities to attend workshops, seminars or conferences where information can be shared regarding providing quality literature to younger readers.

## Conclusions

### *Introduction*

The current study set out to gather more information regarding book selections of economically disadvantaged African American kindergarteners, and to compare those book selections to book selections of Caucasian and Latino readers. Since the 1970's, national reading assessment scores have consistently shown African American students performing on

an average of 30 percentage points lower on reading assessments in comparison to their Latino and Caucasian peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). The data demonstrates a need for more research regarding reading trends of African American students, and the current study set out to examine book selection patterns of African American kindergarteners in order to contribute information that may help improve reading achievement in a group of students who may be falling behind in reading skills according to national data.

### *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework, or rationale, used to guide the current study outlined several factors that may have an impact on reading achievement, including reading amount, reading engagement, and interesting texts. Researchers have an idea of what makes a text interesting for younger readers based on prior book selection studies that outlined influences on the book selections of these younger readers. Prior studies have widely documented influences on book selections related to the reader's gender, the book's genre, familiar and novel content in the book, the influence of others, and physical book characteristics. Less information is known concerning the influence of multicultural content on students' book selections, and the current study set out to specifically discover more information regarding how multicultural content of picture books may influence students' book selections. Results from the present study provide information regarding what younger readers may find interesting in picture books.

The participants' rationales for book selections fell into seven main categories, including Story Elements, Cultural Content, Book Elements, External Influences, Prior Knowledge and Random. These seven themes from the study indicate aspects of picture

books that younger readers may find interesting. Story Elements represent the most popular rationales for book selections from the student participants, which is an indication that story content may have an important influence on students' book selections and may have an important role in reading interest for younger readers. Within story elements, students commented on characteristics of the story related to language, the story containing 'girl' or 'boy' content, the presence of dancing or music, and the presence of funny or humorous content. Teachers and adults responsible for providing literature for younger readers can use this information when choosing books to make available to these readers.

The second most popular rationales for book selections were categorized under Cultural Content, and include comments related to language, dancing, and the presence of 'cool' or 'hip hop' content. There were also comments where students made connections between activities, physical depictions and character depictions that were similar to or reflective of their own culture. This data indicates that younger readers may notice book content that reflects aspects of their culture, and again, adults responsible for providing literature for younger readers can use this information as they consider what picture books to include in classrooms and make available to their students.

Information categorized under the remaining categories of Book Elements, External Influences, Prior Knowledge and Random can also assist adults as they strive to provide interesting and appropriate books for younger readers, and to nurture reading development and literacy. The conceptual framework guiding the current study suggests that the more interesting a reader finds a text, the more likely they will be to engage in that text; the more a reader can engage in reading, the more they will read; and the more a person reads, the better their reading achievement and reading abilities may be. The objective of the current study

was to find information regarding kindergarten students that may impact their reading achievement. The current study found information regarding possible influences on students' book choices, and educators can use this information to provide literature selections that younger readers may find more interesting and more engaging.

### *Influence of Genre on Book Selections of Younger Readers*

The literature review that was used as the foundation for the current study outlines several aspects of reading interests and book selection behaviors in younger readers. Researchers have some indication of what makes a book interesting to younger readers based on information from studies that have examined book selection patterns and reading interests of these individuals. In the literature review used for the current study, several influences on book selections of younger readers were outlined, and the current section discusses how results from the current study are related to several of those influences documented in prior studies.

Prior research discusses at length how book selections of younger readers are influenced by the genre of the respective piece of literature. Several studies document preferences for fiction as well as non-fiction literature (Doiron, 2003; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Henry, 1992). Other studies have indicated that younger readers prefer to read “stories” or narrative literature in comparison to other types of literature such as informational texts (Hall & Cole, 1999; Moss & McDonald, 2004) or folk/fairy tales (Anderson et al., 1985; Castaneda, 1995; Purves & Beaches, 1972). The results from the current study may support the idea that younger readers are more inclined to select narrative types of literature. The study utilized eight picture books, and the two books that were classified as Multicultural were the two books that may have contained the least narrative



storylines. *What a Wonderful World* (Weiss & Thiele, 1995) and *We All Sing With the Same Voice* (Miller & Greene, 2005) were the two Multicultural books used in the study. Both books contain a good story, but perhaps less of a narrative, action-oriented storyline in comparison to the other six books utilized in the study. These two books by far received the least amount of selections from the kindergarten participants. Out of 160 students, *What a Wonderful World* was selected by only one student (0.63%), and *We All Sing With the Same Voice* was selected by seven students (4.38%). These two picture books may not contain the strong narrative storyline in comparison to the other books utilized in the study, and this characteristic may be an explanation for the small numbers of selections by the students.

During interviews, the most frequent rationales given for book selections were related to story elements and story content. This result suggests that the quality of a book's story may be an important influence on the book selections of younger readers, and may be an explanation as to why the two books in the study that contained the least narrative storylines received the least amount of selections by the student participants. Early childhood educators and adults who are responsible for providing literature for younger readers can use the information from the current study as they strive to provide children's literature that students may find interesting, and as they strive to provide books that students will be more likely to select and reselect.

#### *Teacher Influence on Book Selections of Younger Readers*

Prior studies examining book selection patterns and reading interests of younger readers have widely documented the influence of other individuals, including teachers, on the book selections of these readers (Carter, 1988; Casteneda, 1995; Fleener, et al., 1997; Henry, 1992; Jenkins, 1955; Kragler, 2000; Timion, 1992; Wendelin & Zinck, 1988). There are

several ways that teachers may influence book selections of younger readers. Teachers are in a position to recommend books to students, and are largely responsible for the access and availability of books in classrooms (Fleener et al., 1997; Morrow, 1987). Teachers may also influence students' book selections through classroom read-alouds (Doiron, 2003; Simpson, 1996) and through the books they select to place in classrooms and classroom libraries (Fleener, et al., 1997; Morrow, 1987). One particular study conducted with younger readers suggests that individuals from lower economic backgrounds may rely more on teacher influence when making book selections in comparison to students who do not come from lower economic backgrounds (Martinez, et al., 1997; Castaneda, 1995).

The results from the current study also indicate that students' book selections may be influenced by teachers. Results from student interviews indicate that external influences, including teachers, may influence students' book selections. Other information from the student interviews may also indicate teacher influence on book selections and reading interests of younger readers. For example, during interviews, there were certain classrooms where the majority of the students made similar responses regarding rationales for book selections. Many students in one classroom made comments regarding the picture books being award-winning books, and a large number of students in another classroom made comments related to the musical CD and song associated with the book. Numerous students from another classroom made comments regarding the fiction and non-fiction illustrations in the books. A possible explanation for the majority of students in a specific classroom giving similar responses for book selections may be related to teacher influence. The classroom teachers who participated in the study were responsible for introducing and reading each of the eight books used in the study with the students. During read alouds, it is possible that

teachers emphasized certain aspects of the books which may have influenced students' responses.

Also during the present study, several teachers commented that they allowed other individuals to read the books used in the study with the students. These other individuals include the teaching assistant, student volunteers, and classroom interns. It is possible that different individuals reading different books may have influenced students' book selections. For example, perhaps the classroom teacher read some of the books with a great deal of enthusiasm and intonation, and maybe the student intern read some of the books with less enthusiasm, intonation and flow. Prior research indicates that other individuals may influence book selections of younger readers based on the manner in which they read the books aloud to the students. During reading activities, adult behaviors such as reading with intonation, emphasizing pictures, and encouraging reader interaction can influence book selections and reselections of younger readers (Heath, 1982; Morrison, et al., 1997; Morrow, 1988; Palmer et al., 1994; Teale & Sulzby, 1987). The possible variation in reading behaviors may have influenced book selections and rationales for book selections in the current study. Classroom teachers and adults who read aloud to younger individuals can use the information from this study as they strive to be a positive influence on reading behaviors in these younger individuals. Since research suggests that teachers can influence students' book selections by their behaviors during read alouds, then teachers need to make sure that they are using appropriate and engaging reading behaviors such as reading with "voices," and encouraging reader interaction.

### *Book Selection Strategies in Younger Readers*

Based on a review of the literature on reading preferences of younger readers, some researchers assert that younger readers, ages eight and below, do not have reading preferences and may not use book selection strategies when choosing literature to read (Beta Upsilon Chapter of Pi Lambda Theta, 1974; Chui, 1973; Haynes, 1988; Haynes & Richgels, 1992). The current study suggests otherwise; that younger readers do have reading preferences and are using book selection strategies when choosing books to read. Results from qualitative analyses presented seven categories of rationales the students' used when selecting a book for themselves or for peers of similar and different races. The majority of the kindergarten participants were able to give explanations for book selections, which is an occurrence that suggests that younger readers may possess and use book selection strategies when choosing books to read.

The current study also suggests that younger readers may be able to use more sophisticated book selection strategies than previously thought by researchers. Based on a review of the literature regarding reading preferences of younger readers, two studies have offered conclusions on book selections of elementary-aged readers (Childress, 1985; Robinson et al., 1997). While both studies are revolutionary in the sense that they suggest younger readers do possess reading preferences, the findings may suggest that these younger readers are using relatively simple book selection strategies when choosing books to read. Childress (1985) observed book selection strategies mainly based on gender, and Robinson et al. (1997) indicated book selection strategies based on four ideas: the book's genre and reading level, familiar content, and the influence of other individuals. One could assume from these conclusions that while younger readers may possess book selection strategies, that

these strategies are elementary in nature. The current study suggests that readers as young as age five are capable of using sophisticated book selection strategies when choosing books to read. Results from the current study presented seven categories of rationales for students' book selections, which is an indication that younger readers may be using developed and sophisticated strategies when selecting books to read.

### *Conclusion*

In sum, the current study offers information regarding influences on book selections of economically disadvantaged African American kindergarteners, as well as Latino, Caucasian, and Bi-racial kindergarteners. Information was gathered regarding rationales for book selections; cultural content was a theme from the data along with other elements of books such as story content, character elements, and physical book elements. While further examination of the relationship between race and book selections is needed, the data demonstrates that African American and Caucasian students made culturally consistent book selections at a rate of 40%, which is higher than the random selection rate of 25%. In previous years, other researchers have also suggested that African American readers may be more inclined to select and may respond better to multicultural books (Hopson & Hopson, 1993; Katz, 1983; Radencich, 1985; Ramsey, 1987; Rudman, 1984), and these studies also concluded that further examination would be needed to provide scientific evidence supporting their claims. The current study also purports that there may a relationship between race and book selections, but that further examination of this phenomenon is needed.

Table 4.1 Demographic Data

| Characteristics  | Number of Participants |
|------------------|------------------------|
| African American | 37                     |
| Male             | 20                     |
| Female           | 17                     |
| Caucasian        | 85                     |
| Male             | 42                     |
| Female           | 43                     |
| Latino           | 16                     |
| Male             | 7                      |
| Female           | 9                      |
| Bi-racial        | 21                     |
| Male             | 7                      |
| Female           | 14                     |
| Native American  | 1                      |
| Male             | 0                      |
| Female           | 1                      |

Table 4.2. Demographic Data for the Interviewing Sample

| Characteristics  | Number of Participants |
|------------------|------------------------|
| African American | 37                     |
| Male             | 20                     |
| Female           | 17                     |
| Caucasian        | 47                     |
| Male             | 25                     |
| Female           | 22                     |
| Latino           | 16                     |
| Male             | 7                      |
| Female           | 9                      |
| Bi-racial        | 21                     |
| Male             | 7                      |
| Female           | 14                     |
| Native American  | 1                      |
| Male             | 0                      |
| Female           | 1                      |

Table 4.3. Open or Primary Codes

| Code                     | Definition  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Animals                  | Reference to animals in the book  |
| Award Winner             | Reference to the book bearing an award medallion on the front cover, or being an award-winning book |
| Babies                   | Reference to babies in the book   |
| Book Cover               | Reference to aspect of the book's front cover or the covering flap each book contained              |
| Book Size or Shape       | Reference to the book's size or shape   |
| Boy Book                 | Reference to the book being for boys or having 'boy' content  |
| Characters               | Reference to the book's characters  |
| Cool                     | Reference to the book or something in the story being 'cool'  |
| Dancing                  | Reference to dancing and/or movement  |
| Racial/Cultural Identity | Reference to aspect of book that connects with reader's cultural or racial background               |
| Family                   | Reference to the portrayal of families in the book  |
| Fiction                  | Reference to fictional book content or illustrations  |
| Funny, Humor             | Reference to the book being funny or humorous   |
| Girl Book                | Reference to the book being for girls or having 'girl' content                                      |
| Good Story               | Reference to the book having a 'good story'   |
| Hip Hop                  | Reference to 'hip hop' content in the book  |
| Illustrations            | Reference to illustrations in the book  |
| Illustrations: Colors    | Reference to colors used in the book  |



|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Language, Words             | Reference to words or language (e.g. Spanish) in the book  |
| Length                      | Reference to the book's length   |
| Letters                     | Reference to letters, or appearance of letters, in the book                                      |
| Media                       | Reference to media (e.g. CDs, DVDs, television programs)   |
| Music                       | Reference to music or singing in the book  |
| New Book, Never Read Before | Indication that the book is new or has never been read before                                    |
| Non-Fiction                 | Reference to non-fiction book content or illustrations   |
| Page Layout                 | Reference to physical appearance of the book's page(s)   |
| Other People                | Reference to other people (e.g. teachers, friends, family members)                               |
| Pretty, Beautiful           | Reference to the book or illustrations being aesthetically appealing                             |
| Prior Experience            | Reference to aspect of book that connects with the reader's prior activities or experiences      |
| Random                      | Unrelated, irrelevant or inconclusive rationales for book selections                             |
| Rhyme                       | Reference to rhyme or rhythm in the book   |
| Story Recall                | Recalls story with or without assistance of illustrations  |
| Surprise, Suspense          | Reference to the book's content that was surprising, suspenseful or scary                        |
| Windows                     | Reference to book content that offered a glimpse into a culture or group other than the reader's |

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Table 4.4. Axial or Secondary Codes

| Axial Code         | Definition  | Open Codes Grouped under<br>Axial Code   |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Book Elements      | Rationales for book selections that are related to physical aspects of the book;        | Award Winner<br>Book Cover<br>Book Size or Shape<br>Illustrations<br>Illustrations: Colors<br>Length<br>Letters<br>New Book/ Never Read Before<br>Page Layout<br>Pretty/Beautiful<br>Title |
| Character Elements | Rationales for book selections that are related to the characters depicted in the book; | Animals<br>Babies<br>Characters<br>Families  |

|                     |   |   |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Cultural Elements   | Rationales for book selections that are associated with aspects of the reader's culture or race;  | Cool<br>Dancing<br>Racial/Cultural Identity<br>Hip Hop<br>Language, Words<br>Music<br>Windows |
| External Influences | Rationales for book selections that are based on the influence of other people or outside influences;   | Media<br>Other People   |
| Prior Knowledge     | Rationales for book selections based on prior experiences that are related to the book, or the fact that the reader has read the book previously; | Prior Experience<br>Read Before   |
| Random              | Rationales for book selections that are inconclusive or unrelated to the topic of book selection;   | Unrelated, Irrelevant or<br>Inconclusive Responses  |

|                |   |  |
|----------------|---|--|
| Story Elements | Rationales for book selections that are related to the book's story or illustrations; | Boy Book<br>Dancing<br>Fiction<br>Funny, Humor<br>Girl Book<br>Good Story<br>Language, Words<br>Music<br>Non Fiction<br>Rhyme<br>Story Recall With or Without the Assistance of Illustrations<br>Surprise/Suspense |
|----------------|---|--|

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Table 4.5. Frequencies of Rationales for Book Selections

|                        | African<br>American<br>(n=37) | Caucasian<br>(n=85) | Latino<br>(n=16) | Bi-racial<br>(n=21) |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Story Elements         | 331<br>(46%)                  | 540<br>(50%)        | 83<br>(50%)      | 228<br>(47%)        |
| Cultural<br>Content    | 128<br>(18%)                  | 201<br>(18%)        | 21<br>(13%)      | 82<br>(20%)         |
| Book Elements          | 117<br>(16%)                  | 167<br>(15%)        | 27<br>(16%)      | 81<br>(17%)         |
| Character<br>Elements  | 64<br>(9%)                    | 96<br>(9%)          | 18<br>(11%)      | 30<br>(6%)          |
| External<br>Influences | 25<br>(3%)                    | 27<br>(2%)          | 1<br>(1%)        | 14<br>(3%)          |
| Prior<br>Knowledge     | 24<br>(3%)                    | 32<br>(3%)          | 1<br>(1%)        | 16<br>(3%)          |
| Random                 | 29<br>(4%)                    | 24<br>(2%)          | 14<br>(8%)       | 17<br>(4%)          |

Table 4.6. Rationales for Book Selections for Axial Code Cultural Content

|                             | African<br>American<br>(n=37) | Caucasian<br>(n=47) | Latino<br>(n=16) | Bi-racial<br>(n=21) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Cool                        | 3<br>(2%)                     | 4<br>(2%)           | 0<br>(0%)        | 3<br>(4%)           |
| Dancing                     | 10<br>(8%)                    | 13<br>(6%)          | 1<br>(5%)        | 1<br>(1%)           |
| Racial/Cultural<br>Identity | 30<br>(23%)                   | 60<br>(30%)         | 2<br>(10%)       | 18<br>(22%)         |
| Hip Hop                     | 2<br>(2%)                     | 2<br>(1%)           | 0<br>(0%)        | 4<br>(5%)           |
| Language/Words              | 55<br>(43%)                   | 90<br>(45%)         | 13<br>(62%)      | 39<br>(48%)         |
| Music                       | 28<br>(22%)                   | 31<br>(15%)         | 5<br>(24%)       | 16<br>(20%)         |
| Windows                     | 0<br>(0%)                     | 1<br>(.5%)          | 0<br>(0%)        | 1<br>(1%)           |

Table 4.7. Rationales for Book Selections for Axial Code Story Elements

|                | African<br>American<br>(n=37) | Caucasian<br>(n=47) | Latino<br>(n=16) | Bi-racial<br>(n=21) |
|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Boy Book       | 4<br>(1%)                     | 6<br>(1%)           | 0<br>(0%)        | 1<br>(.4%)          |
| Dancing        | 10<br>(3%)                    | 13<br>(2%)          | 1<br>(1%)        | 1<br>(.4%)          |
| Fiction        | 2<br>(1%)                     | 6<br>(1%)           | 0<br>(0%)        | 1<br>(.4%)          |
| Funny, Humor   | 20<br>(6%)                    | 76<br>(14%)         | 14<br>(17%)      | 21<br>(9%)          |
| Girl Book      | 2<br>(1%)                     | 4<br>(1%)           | 0<br>(0%)        | 0<br>(0%)           |
| Good Story     | 1<br>(.3%)                    | 1<br>(.2%)          | 0<br>(0%)        | 3<br>(1%)           |
| Language/Words | 55<br>(17%)                   | 90<br>(17%)         | 13<br>(16%)      | 39<br>(17%)         |
| Music          | 28<br>(8%)                    | 31<br>(6%)          | 5<br>(6%)        | 16<br>(7%)          |
| Non-Fiction    | 2<br>(1%)                     | 7<br>(1%)           | 0<br>(0%)        | 5<br>(2%)           |

|                   |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Rhyme             | 0     | 2     | 0     | 0     |
|                   | (0%)  | (.4%) | (0%)  | (.4%) |
| Story Recall With | 207   | 303   | 50    | 140   |
| or Without the    | (63%) | (56%) | (60%) | (61%) |
| Assistance of     |       |       |       |       |
| Illustrations     |       |       |       |       |
| Surprise/Suspense | 0     | 1     | 0     | 1     |
|                   | (0%)  | (.2%) | (0%)  | (.4%) |

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Table 4.8. Rationales for Book Selections for Axial Code Book Elements

|                                  | African<br>American<br>(n=37) | Caucasian<br>(n=47) | Latino<br>(n=16) | Bi-racial<br>(n=21) |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Award Winner                     | 4<br>(4%)                     | 11<br>(7%)          | 1<br>(4%)        | 3<br>(4%)           |
| Book Cover                       | 19<br>(18%)                   | 18<br>(11%)         | 3<br>(11%)       | 6<br>(7%)           |
| Book<br>Size/Shape               | 0<br>(0%)                     | 0<br>(0%)           | 0<br>(0%)        | 1<br>(1%)           |
| Illustrations                    | 30<br>(28%)                   | 61<br>(37%)         | 7<br>(26%)       | 23<br>(28%)         |
| Illustrations:<br>Colors         | 27<br>(25%)                   | 11<br>(7%)          | 3<br>(11%)       | 13<br>(16%)         |
| Length                           | 2<br>(2%)                     | 1<br>(.6%)          | 1<br>(4%)        | 0<br>(0%)           |
| Letters                          | 7<br>(6%)                     | 19<br>(11%)         | 0<br>(0%)        | 7<br>(9%)           |
| New<br>Book/Never<br>Read Before | 1<br>(1%)                     | 5<br>(3%)           | 4<br>(15%)       | 1<br>(1%)           |
| Page Layout                      | 12<br>(11%)                   | 17<br>(10%)         | 3<br>(11%)       | 4<br>(5%)           |

|                  |      |       |       |       |
|------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Pretty/Beautiful | 6    | 16    | 5     | 19    |
|                  | (6%) | (10%) | (19%) | (23%) |
| Title            | 0    | 8     | 0     | 4     |
|                  | (0%) | (5%)  | (0%)  | (5%)  |

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Table 4.9. Book Selections of All Participants

|   | African<br>American<br>Books | Caucasian<br>Books | Latino<br>Books | Multicultural<br>Books |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| African<br>Participants<br>(n=37)           | 16<br>(43.24%)               | 10<br>(27.03%)     | 7<br>(18.92%)   | 4<br>(10.81%)          |
| Caucasian<br>Participants<br>(n=85)         | 25<br>(29.41%)               | 35<br>(41.18%)     | 23<br>(27.06%)  | 2<br>(2.35%)           |
| Latino<br>Participants<br>(n=16)            | 8<br>(50.00%)                | 4<br>(25.00%)      | 3<br>(18.75%)   | 1<br>(6.25%)           |
| Bi-racial<br>Participants<br>(n=21)         | 8<br>(38.10%)                | 4<br>(19.05%)      | 8<br>(38.10%)   | 1<br>(4.76%)           |
| Native<br>American<br>Participants<br>(n=1) | 0<br>(0%)                    | 0<br>(0%)          | 1<br>(100%)     | 0<br>(0%)              |

Note. Chi-Square Value Probability (.245) or P= .245 at the p=.05 significance level

Table 4.10. Book Selections by African American Participants for African American Peers

|                                 | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Jazz Baby                       | 4         | 10.81   |
| (African American book)         |           |         |
| Yo Jo                           | 5         | 13.51   |
| (African American book)         |           |         |
| Knuffle Bunny                   | 8         | 21.62   |
| (Caucasian book)                |           |         |
| Roar of a Snore                 | 7         | 18.92   |
| (Caucasian book)                |           |         |
| Bebe Goes Shopping              | 5         | 13.51   |
| (Latino book)                   |           |         |
| Tooth on the Loose              | 0         | 0.00    |
| (Latino book)                   |           |         |
| What a Wonderful World          | 5         | 13.51   |
| (Multicultural book)            |           |         |
| We All Sing With the Same Voice | 3         | 8.11    |
| (Multicultural book)            |           |         |

Note. Chi-Square Value Probability (.24) or P= .24 at the p=.05 significance level

Table 4.11. Book Selections by African American Participants for Caucasian Peers

|  | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Jazz Baby  | 4         | 10.81   |
| (African American book)  |           |         |
| Yo Jo  | 4         | 10.81   |
| (African American book)  |           |         |
| Knuffle Bunny  | 7         | 18.92   |
| (Caucasian book)   |           |         |
| Roar of a Snore  | 4         | 10.81   |
| (Caucasian book)   |           |         |
| Bebe Goes Shopping   | 6         | 16.22   |
| (Latino book)  |           |         |
| Tooth on the Loose   | 8         | 21.62   |
| (Latino book)  |           |         |
| What a Wonderful World   | 2         | 5.41    |
| (Multicultural book)   |           |         |
| We All Sing With the Same Voice  | 2         | 5.41    |
| (Multicultural book)   |           |         |
| Note. Chi-Square Value Probability (.29) or P= .29 at the p=.05 significance level |           |         |

Table 4.12. Book Selections by African American Participants for Latino Peers

|  | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Jazz Baby  | 3         | 8.11    |
| (African American book)  |           |         |
| Yo Jo  | 3         | 8.11    |
| (African American book)  |           |         |
| Knuffle Bunny  | 7         | 18.92   |
| (Caucasian book)   |           |         |
| Roar of a Snore  | 4         | 10.81   |
| (Caucasian book)   |           |         |
| Bebe Goes Shopping   | 6         | 16.22   |
| (Latino book)  |           |         |
| Tooth on the Loose   | 6         | 16.22   |
| (Latino book)  |           |         |
| What a Wonderful World   | 6         | 16.22   |
| (Multicultural book)   |           |         |
| We All Sing With the Same Voice  | 2         | 5.41    |
| (Multicultural book)   |           |         |
| Note. Chi-Square Value Probability (.32) or P= .32 at the p=.05 significance level |           |         |

APPENDIX A  
PARENTAL CONSENT FORMS

**University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill  
Parental Permission for a Minor Child to Participate in a Research Study  
Social Behavioral Form**

---

**IRB Study #** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Consent Form Version Date:** September 1, 2009

**Title of Study:** Book Selections of Kindergarten Students

**Principal Investigator:** Beth Dawkins  
**UNC-Chapel Hill Department:** School of Education  
**Email Address:** bdawkins@email.unc.edu  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Melissa Miller, 919-843-1979; melmillr@email.unc.edu  
**Study Contact telephone number:** (704) 763-7481  
**Study Contact email:** bdawkins@email.unc.edu

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**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to give permission, or you may withdraw your permission for your child to be in the study, for any reason. Even if you give your permission, your child can decide not to be in the study or to leave the study early.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. Your child may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you and your child can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this permission form. You and your child should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research study is to learn about the book selections of kindergarten students. There are many different books in classrooms and libraries that teachers and children can choose from. I am interested in learning more from children themselves about why children like some books more than others that are read to them in class.

**How many people will take part in this study?**

If your child is in this study, your child will be one of approximately 60 children, and their teachers, in this research study. I want to include children on different ages and from different ethnic groups, so I will ask you about your child's age and ethnicity at the end of this form.

**How long will your child's part in this study last?**

If you give permission, I may invite your child to talk with me in a quiet place in the classroom for about 10-15 minutes about books your child likes.

**What will happen if your child takes part in the study?**

Your child's teacher will read 8 new picture books to everyone in the class, whether they are in the study or not. These books have been donated to the class library.

Children in the study will be asked to talk with me in a quiet place in the classroom about their favorite book, and why it is their favorite. Many questions can be answered by just pointing at the books, and some questions will be answered in words. They can skip over any questions they do not want to answer.

Because I want to know exactly what each child says, I want to tape-record our conversation, so I do not have to take notes. However, if you don't want me to tape record, then I can just take notes. There is a place to indicate that at the end of this form.

It is possible that there will not be enough time to interview every child whose parent gives permission, but I hope to include as many children as I can.

**What are the possible benefits from being in this study?**

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. I do not expect your child will benefit just by being in this study. However, all the children in the class may benefit from the new, high-quality children's books which have been donated to the classroom library.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

There are no risks or discomforts anticipated. They conversations with the students are short, and private, and the children can stop at any time they like. I will ask children if they want to talk with me, and if they do not want to talk, then I will ask again later. If they still say no, then I will not ask them again.

**How will your child's privacy be protected?**

I will not use any child's real name in any report of my findings from my study. I will use only first names on forms, and then replace those with ID codes. I will erase the audiotapes that I used to record the conversations after I have transcribed, or written down, what the children have said to me. All study materials will be stored on my own computer, and everything will be password-protected.

**Will your child receive anything for being in this study?**

Your child will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

**Will it cost you anything for your child to be in this study?**

There will be no costs for being in the study

**What if you or your child has questions about this study?**

You and your child have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, complaints or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.



**What if you or your child has questions about your child's rights as a research participant?**

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you or your child has questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB\_subjects@unc.edu.

-----  
**Title of Study:** Book Selections of Kindergarten Students

**Principal Investigator:** Beth Dawkins

**Parent's Decision: Please check the response below that reflects your decision.**

**EVERYONE SHOULD RETURN A FORM, WHETHER YOU ARE SAYING YES OR NO.**

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I voluntarily give permission for my child to participate in this research study.  
                                  \_\_\_ OK to record my child's comments.  
                                  \_\_\_ NOT OK to record my child's comments- just take notes.

OR

\_\_\_\_\_ No thanks, I am not interested in my child being in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Research Participant (Child)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent

Child's birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

(for example, African American or Black; Caucasian or White; Latino or Hispanic; Asian, bi-racial or multi-racial; Other)

## APPENDIX B

### ORAL CONSENT PROTOCOL

#### Verbal Assent Script for Study Participation

#### **For use by teachers, when telling students about the study and about the parent permission forms:**

Miss Dawkins wants to talk to kindergarten students, like you, about the kinds of books you like. She is doing a study so she can learn what kindergarteners like. After the study, she wants to tell the people who choose books for libraries and classrooms what children like. She needs your parent's permission for you to talk with her. I am putting letters to your parents in your cubby spaces. Please take home the letters, and bring back ONE copy, that your parent signs, to show that your parent has read it. Your parent can say YES or NO, about whether Miss Dawkins can talk with you. Even if your parent says YES, you can still say, "no, thanks" if Miss Dawkins asks you to talk with her. And she may not get a chance to talk to every student who wants to be in her study. I will put the letters you bring back from your parents into this big envelope, so Miss Dawkins can see who wants to be in her study. Please don't forget to bring back the letter with your parent's name on it.

#### **For individual interviews:**

My name is Miss Dawkins and I want to learn more about the kinds of books students like to read. I would like for you to help me learn this by answering some questions about some books your teacher read to you. You can stop at any time, and if I ask you a question you don't like, you don't have to answer it. You can say yes or no, thanks. It will not make a difference to your teacher. Would you like to help me?

## APPENDIX C

### LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

(Date)

Beth K. Dawkins  
201 NC 54 Bypass, Apt. 411  
Carrboro, NC 27510

Dear (Principal's Name):

Hello. My name is Beth Dawkins and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy Degree (Ph.D), and am in the dissertation phase of my doctoral studies. Prior to coming to UNC, I taught pre-kindergarten for 2 years in Charlotte, North Carolina, and for 1 year in Guadalajara, Mexico. I also worked for several months with pre-kindergarten programs in Albania, Eastern Europe, and wrote a bi-lingual children's book in the languages of English and Albanian. My career passions include working to improve early childhood education programs, and working to provide young children with quality children's literature.

My dissertation research is focused on book selections of economically- disadvantaged African American kindergarteners. National reading assessment scores consistently show African American students scoring on an average of 30 percentage points behind their Caucasian and Latino peers in reading achievement. National reading assessment data also show that students who receive free/reduced lunch are scoring roughly 30 percentage points behind students who do not qualify for free/reduced lunch. These national reading achievement scores indicate that students of African American ethnicity and students who are economically disadvantaged are falling behind in reading achievement. These national trends are unacceptable and need immediate attention.

This study seeks to find more information regarding influences on book selections of younger readers. Currently, we know a great deal about how children's book selections are affected by influences such as: the reader's gender, the book's genre, the influence of others, physical book characteristics, and the presence of familiar/novel book content. We know less about how book selections are influenced by multicultural content found in picture books. The hypothesis guiding the study is that students will be more likely to read and select a book that has content (language, themes, illustrations) that matches the culture of the reader.

In this study, I will work with approximately 60 kindergarteners in schools having ethnically-diverse student populations, including African American and Latino students. I will also work with schools having significant populations of students receiving free/reduced lunch. My study will have equal percentages of African American, Caucasian and Latino kindergarteners. Each classroom that is participating in the study will be given a set of eight, new, high-quality picture books. Two of the books represent African American culture, two represent Caucasian culture, two represent Latino culture, and two are multicultural. These high-quality picture books will be donated to participating classrooms, and classroom

teachers will be asked to read each book to the class in whole-group settings prior to my coming into the classroom.

When I come into the classroom, I will conduct a brief interview with individual students whose parents have given permission. The interview includes several questions designed to elicit information regarding the eight books that were donated to the classroom. Student who are participating will be asked which book, of these books, is their favorite book, and why. Students will also be asked which book they think an African American, Caucasian, and Latino peer would want to read. Other questions will ask students to explain their book selections for themselves and for peers of similar/different ethnicities. The individual interviews will be conducted in a quiet area of the student's classroom, and should last from 10-15 minutes. All interviews will be audio-recorded with parent permission. The results of my study will be summarized in a report that will be shared with you and your teachers. All names and locations will be kept confidential.

Through this study, I seek to impact reading achievement in African American students, including those who are economically-disadvantaged, by discovering more information regarding their book selections and reading interests. I also plan to discover more about book selections and reading interests of Caucasian and Latino students, including those who are economically disadvantaged.

Thank you for your time and consideration in supporting my efforts to conduct research in your school. I am very excited about working in your school and with you teachers. Please feel free to contact me should you have questions or comments.

I will contact you to discuss the possibility of conducting my study in your school.

Sincerely,

Beth K. Dawkins

APPENDIX D  
LETTER TO TEACHERS

(Date)

Beth K. Dawkins  
201 NC 54 Bypass, Apt. 411  
Carrboro, NC 27510

Dear (Teacher's Name):

Hello. My name is Beth Dawkins and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy Degree (Ph.D), and am in the dissertation phase of my doctoral studies. Prior to coming to UNC, I taught pre-kindergarten for 2 years in Charlotte, North Carolina, and for 1 year in Guadalajara, Mexico. I also worked for several months with pre-kindergarten programs in Albania, Eastern Europe, and wrote a bi-lingual children's book in the languages of English and Albanian. My career passions include working to improve early childhood education programs, and working to provide young children with quality children's literature.

My dissertation research is focused on book selections of economically-disadvantaged African American kindergarteners. National reading assessment scores consistently show African American students scoring on an average of 30 percentage points behind their Caucasian and Latino peers in reading achievement. National reading assessment data also show that students who receive free/reduced lunch are scoring roughly 30 percentage points below students who do not qualify for free/reduced lunch. These national reading achievement scores indicate that students of African American ethnicity and students who are economically disadvantaged are falling behind in reading achievement. These national trends are unacceptable and need immediate attention.

This study seeks to find more information regarding influences on book selections of younger readers. Currently, we know a great deal about how children's book selections are affected by influences such as: the reader's gender, the book's genre, the influence of others, physical book characteristics, and the presence of familiar/novel book content. We know less about how book selections are influenced by multicultural content found in picture books. The hypothesis guiding the study is that students will be more likely to read and select a book that has content (language, themes, illustrations) that match the culture of the reader.

In this study, I will work with approximately 60 kindergarteners. My study will have equal percentages of African American, Caucasian and Latino kindergarteners. Each classroom that is participating in the study will be given a set of eight, new, high-quality picture books. Two of the books represent African American culture, two represent Caucasian culture, two represent Latino culture, and two are multicultural. These high-quality picture books will be donated to participating classrooms. You as the teacher will be asked to read each book to the class in whole-group settings prior to my coming into the classroom to conduct brief individual interviews with children whose parents have given permission. When I meet with you individually, I will give you a checklist to help you keep track of book readings. I will ask you to distribute the parent permission forms to the students, and read a short script that I have written to explain the study to the students. I also would

like to schedule a time to come into your classroom, perhaps during a whole-group activity, so that I may be introduced to the class before I begin my interviews.

After you have read all eight books to the class, I will come into your classroom to interview individual students whose parents have given permission. The interview includes several questions designed to elicit information regarding the eight books that were donated to the class, which you have read to all the students. Students who are participating in the study will be asked which book, of these books, is their favorite book, and why. Students will also be asked which book they think an African American, Caucasian, and Latino peer would want to read. Other questions will ask students to explain their book selections for themselves and for peers of similar/different ethnicities. The individual interviews will be conducted in a quiet area of your classroom, and should last from 10-15 minutes. All interviews will be audio-recorded with parent permission. The results of my study will be summarized in a report that will be shared with you and your principal. All names and locations will be kept confidential.

Through this study, I seek to impact reading achievement in African American students, including those who are economically-disadvantaged, by discovering more information regarding their book selections and reading interests. I also plan to discover more about book selections and reading interests of Caucasian and Latino students, including those who are economically disadvantaged.

Thank you for your time and consideration in supporting my efforts to conduct research in your classroom. I am excited about working with you and your students! Please read through the attached Teacher Consent form. I am also including a copy of the Parent Permission form so that you will know what the parents of your students will receive.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding your interest in my study. Please feel free to contact me should you have questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Beth K. Dawkins

# APPENDIX E

## TEACHER CHECKLIST

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Checklist Given: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Checklist Returned: \_\_\_\_\_

### Checklist of Book Readings

| <b>Book Title/Author</b>   | <b>Date Read to Class</b> | <b>LIST students who were absent (or who did not have the opportunity to hear this book)</b> |
|--|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Bebe Goes Shopping</b><br>Susan M. Elya                                       |                           |  |
| <b>Jazz Baby</b><br>Lisa Wheeler   |                           |  |
| <b>Knuffle Bunny</b><br>Mo Willems   |                           |  |
| <b>Roar of a Snore</b><br>Marsha Diane Arnold                                    |                           |  |
| <b>Tooth on the Loose</b><br>Susan M. Elya                                       |                           |  |
| <b>What a Wonderful World</b><br>George David Weiss &<br>Bob Thiele              |                           |  |
| <b>We All Sing With the Same Voice</b><br>J. Phillip Miller &<br>Sheppard Greene |                           |  |
| <b>Yo, Jo</b><br>Rachel Isadora  |                           |  |

- **Please read all 8 books between (insert dates here)**
- Please read all books in the same manner (same level of enthusiasm and intonation)
- Please do not conduct any extension activities or use any props associated with books until after the data collection for the study in your classroom complete
- Please keep all books in the classroom library and accessible to all students


## APPENDIX F

### DATA COLLECTION ANTICIPATED TIMELINE

| Date                | Activity  |
|---------------------|---|
| July to August      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissertation proposal meeting</li> <li>• Revisions?</li> <li>• IRB</li> <li>• Purchase picture books (11 sets)</li> </ul>  |
| August to September | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with DPS to arrange for data collection in Durham Public elementary schools</li> <li>• Work with principals to identify participating teachers</li> <li>• Meet with all teachers to discuss study, donate books to classrooms, and set up tentative calendar for classroom visits</li> <li>• Visit each classroom once/ ask teachers to introduce me to students</li> </ul> |
| October to December | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey administration in each classroom (bring snack)</li> <li>• Schedule/administer follow-up interviews with individual students (give gift card to each student)</li> </ul> <p><b>Goal: to finish data collection by December</b></p>   |



APPENDIX G  
LIST OF PICTURE BOOKS USED IN STUDY

|   | <b>Book Title</b>             | <b>Author<br/>Copyright Date</b>                  | <b>Description</b>                     |
|---|-------------------------------|---|--|
|    | Jazz Baby                     | Lisa Wheeler<br>2007                              | African American<br>culture<br>Fiction |
|    | Yo, Jo                        | Rachel Isadora<br>2007                            | African American<br>culture<br>Fiction |
|    | Knuffle Bunny                 | Mo Willems<br>2004                                | Caucasian culture<br>Fiction           |
|   | Roar of a Snore               | Marsha Diane Arnold<br>2006                       | Caucasian culture<br>Fiction           |
|  | Bebe Goes Shopping            | Susan Middleton Elya<br>2006                      | Latino culture<br>Fiction              |
|  | Tooth on the Loose            | Susan Middleton Elya<br>2008                      | Latino culture<br>Fiction              |
|  | What a Wonderful World        | George David Weiss<br>&<br>Bob Thiele<br>1995     | Multicultural<br>Fiction               |
|  | We All Sing in the Same Voice | J. Phillip Miller &<br>Sheppard M. Greene<br>2005 | Multicultural<br>Fiction               |

APPENDIX H  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
Dawkins Child Scoring Form and Questions

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

**[PLACE books on table in front of child's seat, in standard order; CIRCLE child's selection]**

**[I'd like to ask you a few questions about these books, and I want to tape record what you say, and write some of that down too. Is that okay? Ok, great.]**

|  |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|--|---|--|
|   |   |   |   | <p>1. From all of these books, which book would you like to read the most?</p> <p>Which book is your favorite book?</p> <p>Point to that book, please.</p> |
|  |  |  |  |  |

2. Why would you like to read this book the most? Why is this book your favorite book from the group of books? (focus on personal connection)?

3. Tell me, what is this book about? (focus on topic)

4. Tell me, what do you like about 'the action' or 'what happened' in the story (focus on story events)

5. Tell me, what do you like about the people or the characters in the story? (focus on characters)

6. Tell me, what do you like about the pictures in the story? (focus on illustrations)

7. Tell me, who else do you think would like this book? And why? (focus on social connection)

8. Is there anything else you want to tell me about this book?

**[ADD POSTERS onto table along with books; CIRCLE child's selection]**



The children in Picture 1

The children in Picture 2

The children in Picture 3

|  |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|--|---|--|
|   |   |   |   | <p>AA1. Which book do you think the children in <b>Picture 1</b> [point] would like to read the most? Which book do you think would be their favorite? Point to that book.</p> |
|  |  |  |  |  |

AA2. Tell me about the children in this picture [**Picture 1—African American**]. Would you describe these children for me please? (focus on ethnic identity)

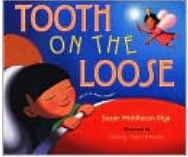

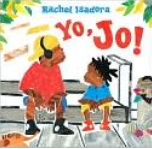
AA3. Tell me, why did you choose this book for these children? [**MOVE SELECTED BOOK NEXT TO POSTER**]

AA4. Tell me, why do you think these children will want to read this book?

AA5. Tell me, why do you think these children will not want to read these other books?

AA6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about why you chose this book for these children?

AA7. Is there anything else you want to tell me about why you think these children will want to read this book?

|   |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|---|--|--|
|  |  |  |  | <p><b>C1.</b> Which book do you think the children in <b>Picture 2</b> would like to read the most? Which book do you think would be their favorite? Point to that book.</p> |
|  |  |  |  |  |

C2. Tell me about the children in this picture [**Picture 2-Caucasian**]. Would you describe these children for me please? (focus on ethnic identity)

C3. Tell me, why did you choose this book for these children? [**MOVE SELECTED BOOK NEXT TO POSTER**]

C4. Tell me, why do you think these children will want to read this book?

C5. Tell me, why do you think these children will not want to read these other books?

C6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about why you chose this book for these children?

C7. Is there anything else you want to tell me about why you think these children will want to read this book?

|   |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|---|--|--|
|  |  |  |  | <p><b>L1.</b> Which book do you think the children in <b>Picture 3</b> would like to read the most? Which book do you think would be their favorite? Point to that book.</p> |
|  |  |  |  |  |

L2. Tell me about the children in this picture **[Picture 3-Latino]**. Would you describe these children for me please? (focus on ethnic identity)

L3. Tell me, why did you choose this book for these children? **[MOVE SELECTED BOOK NEXT TO POSTER]**







L4. Tell me, why do you think these children will want to read this book?

L5. Tell me, why do you think these children will not want to read these other books?

L6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about why you chose this book for these children?

L7. Is there anything else you want to tell me about why you think these children will want to read this book?

**[HAVE JUST POSTERS on table in front of child; CIRCLE child's response]**

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| From these three pictures, which group of children do you look like?               |  |  |
|   |   | The children in Picture 1?<br>[Poster 1: African American female/male] |
|   |   | The children in Picture 2?<br>[Poster 2: Caucasian female/male]        |
|  |  | The children in Picture 3?<br>[Poster 3: Latino female/male]           |

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