SEEKING SPACES FOR NEGOTIATION: ISSUES OF AGENCY WHEN STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO DECISIONS ABOUT CURRICULUM

Wendy Lunsford Staskiewicz

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education (Early Childhood, Special Education, and Literacy).

Chapel Hill
2014

Approved by:
Jocelyn Glazier
Lynne Vernon-Feagans
Julie Justice
George Noblit
Kim Pyne
ABSTRACT

WENDY LUNSFORD STASKIEWICZ: Seeking Spaces for Negotiation: Issues of Agency When Students Contribute to Decisions about Curriculum (Under the direction of Jocelyn Glazier)

This study used a design experiment approach (Brown, 1992) to explore what happens when students recommend and negotiate with teachers about which informational texts will be used in English language arts lessons. The study was framed by Third Space Theory (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996), which supported an examination of the disjunctures between first spaces (ways of knowing and doing valued by individual students) and second spaces (ways of knowing and doing valued by a teacher). The study considered how issues of teacher agency and student agency influenced negotiations about which texts were chosen for use in an upcoming lesson. The study also explored how text selection and negotiation related to student engagement. As a design experiment, this study included a series of two iterations in separate classrooms. Between each study iteration, the researcher adjusted classroom procedures to influence as possible the development of a third space where students and teachers would have the opportunity to influence each other’s choice of texts and classroom experience more generally. Findings from the study suggested that for students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum, both teachers and students must feel that their first space and second space goals are protected throughout the process. A set of protocols is offered to demonstrate how teachers and students can negotiate and share in decision-making around choices for curriculum.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Consider for a moment how profound it is that this study of teachers would not have been possible without them. Like all of my accomplishments, this milestone is the result of excellent teaching. Therefore, this entire study, and this acknowledgement, is devoted to teachers.

First of all, I must acknowledge my very first teachers, my parents, who continue to help me each day. My mother taught that a meaningful life is devoted to the service of others. I am still amazed at all she does for others without ceasing. Our father taught us about hard work and critical thinking. Through his considerable rants and ever high standards, he drilled into us that anyone could succeed, but only through an uncompromising work ethic. Their polarized teaching styles, ever gentle and ever harsh, were ideal preparation for grad school.

Next I acknowledge my school teachers for igniting my love of reading and providing the inspiration for this study. Fourth grade teacher Anne Elam taught me to read for sheer pleasure. Marie Cates, Barbara King, and Susan Juska taught me to read with greater care to appreciate the craft of authoring. They—as well as Mrs. Brooks, Elaine Cunningham, Donna Newell, Wanda Ball, Pam Brewer, Carol Allen, and Brenda Long—helped me to imagine my own potential.

Several excellent professors also deserve my acknowledgement. Thanks especially to Dr. Judith Howard at Elon University, who gave me a deep appreciation for special education and convinced me that I could successfully pursue a doctoral degree. Thanks to Dr. Harriett
Able, Dr. Jeff Greene, Dr. Judith Meece, Dr. Lynda Stone, and my grad school crush Dr. Bill Ware for opening my eyes to many more post-positivist truths at UNC. Thanks most especially to the dear members of my committee, Dr. Jocelyn Glazier, Dr. Julie Justice, Dr. George Noblit, Dr. Kim Pyne, and Dr. Lynne Vernon-Feagans. I consider you my rescuers as well as my beloved teachers.

Through this process, I met an amazing group of friends who taught me that the quest for a doctorate is as much about the journey as the destination. Thanks to Belle Booker, Helen Crompton, Beth Cutrer, Hatice Ghulamani, Adam Holland, Ritsa Mallous, Kathryn Ohle, Lorrie Schmid, and Kris Zorigian, for helping me to find hilarity in absurdity.

I also want to acknowledge Person County Schools and the Board of Education for allowing me to serve our school system while completing my degree. I have been privileged to grow under the supervision of Dr. Larry Cartner, Marionette Jeffers, Danny Holloman, and, for a short time, Dr. Tom Daly. Thank you for sharing with me your philosophies of leadership and for supporting my studies. Thanks also to my closest colleagues Paula Chandler, Ashley Cooper, Deanene Deaton, Kathy Hall, Lily Hayes, Shirley Paylor, Jenna Regan, Teresa Shotwell, and Lori Stacey for their listening ears and constant encouragement.

And finally to Eric, Evan, and Zoe: I cannot imagine completing this grueling process without having a softer, sweeter, more forgiving universe always awaiting me at home each night. Thank you for teaching me love without limits. I consider you, and the many blessings above, just more evidence of God’s grace in my life.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES........................................................................................................... xiv

LIST OF FIGURES......................................................................................................... xv

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS............................................................................................... xvi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION................................................................. 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking New Agents for Reading in High Schools........... 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification and Significance of the Study.............. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Purpose...................................................... 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions ......................................................... 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE................................. 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Space Theory........................................................... 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of Third Space Theory.................................... 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Space Theory as Applied in K-12 Literacy Education Research................................. 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of Applying Third Space Theory to Studies of Classrooms.............................. 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency in Classrooms ....................................................... 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Agency in Classrooms....................................... 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual capacity for teacher agency.................... 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Agency that both supports and contends with students ........................................................................ 19

Challenges to teacher agency as conceptualized in the literature ......................................................... 21

Student Agency in Classrooms ................................................................. 22

Student agency and school reform initiatives .................. 23

Potential problems with student agency initiatives........... 24

Adolescent Readers and Reading Engagement .................. 26

Reading Engagement and Adolescent Readers in School .... 27

Engaging adolescents in school-based reading through multimedia ..................................................... 28

Engaging adolescents in school-based reading through sociocultural connections ................................ 29

Engaging adolescents in school-based reading through choice and agency ........................................... 31

Challenges of Incorporating Adolescents’ Reading Choices in Classrooms ........................................ 33

Informational Texts .................................................................................. 35

Defining Informational Text ................................................................. 36

Challenges for Engagement in School-based Informational Texts ......................................................... 38

Improving Reading Engagement around Informational Texts ................................................................. 39

Summary .................................................................................................... 40

III RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY ................................................. 42

Research Questions .................................................................................. 42

Study Design ............................................................................................ 43
Classroom Procedures ................................................................................................. 44
Participants .................................................................................................................. 47
Data Collection ............................................................................................................ 48
  Reading Attitude Survey ......................................................................................... 48
  Classroom Observation ......................................................................................... 49
  Students’ Text Recommendations ......................................................................... 51
  Teacher and Student Interviews ........................................................................... 51
  Fieldnotes from Informal Discussions with Teachers ........................................... 52
Data Analysis .............................................................................................................. 53

IV  JUST A LITTLE BIT OF FREEDOM-FINDINGS FOR ITERATION A ............ 56

  Questions of Control—Teacher Characteristics ............................................... 56
  A Range of Reading Attitudes—Student Characteristics .................................... 60
  A Tale of Two Classes—Class Characteristics ................................................... 64
  Cycling Back to Enthusiasm—Findings for Secondary Research
    Question #1 ........................................................................................................... 68
      Introduction to the Task .................................................................................... 68
      The Search for Informational Texts ................................................................. 70
      Students’ Recommendations ......................................................................... 72
  Teacher Knows Best—Findings for Secondary Research
    Question #2 ........................................................................................................... 75
      Protocol for Negotiation ................................................................................... 75
      What Happened During Negotiations ............................................................ 76
      Improvements over the Pilot Study ................................................................ 80
      Limitations to Negotiation Process .................................................................. 81
Limited preparation…………………………………………………………..81
Traditional classroom roles………………………………………………..82
Student disappointment……………………………………………………84
Limited benefit for students…………………………………………………85
Summary………………………………………………………………………86

Engagement in First Spaces Only—Findings for Secondary Research Question #3………………………………………..87
  Influence of Student Interest on Engagement…………………………87
  Influence of Negotiation on Engagement……………………………..89
  Limited Engagement during the ELA Lesson…………………………..91
  Summary……………………………………………………………………93

Tradition, Demands, and Beliefs—Findings for Secondary Research Question #4 ……………………………………………………93
  Adherence to Traditional Classroom Roles……………………………94
  Demands of the Curriculum………………………………………………96
  Beliefs about Students’ Motivations…………………………………….98
  Lessening Barriers to Student Agency…………………………………..101

V CONSULTANTS WITH OUR TEACHER-FINDINGS FOR ITERATION B……103
  Dealing with Individuals--Teacher Characteristic…………………………103
  A Narrower, More Positive Range of Reading Attitudes--Student Characteristics……………………………………………………108
  Engagement, Compliance, and Contention--Class Characteristics……..113
  Adjustments to Classroom Protocols for Study Iteration B……………..118
  More Confidence, Less Confusion—Findings for Secondary Research Question #1 …………………………………………………120
Associations of Reading with Fiction and School
Teacher Attraction to the Traditional Literary Canon
Reading Engagement
Interest Makes All the Difference
Reader-Centered Text Selection and Engagement
Opening Up to the Power of Online Multimedia Texts
Issues of Agency
Teacher Agency and Levels of Experience
Student Agency and Age Differences
Trumping Student Agency
Teacher Agency on Behalf of Students
Supporting Student Agency
Imagining New Student Agency
Prompting New Understandings of Students
Implications
Leveraging Reading Engagement in First Spaces
Barriers in Curriculum and Standards
Barriers in Building Units of Study
Leveraging Multiple Forms of Literacy
Valuing Multiple Forms of Literacy in the Real World
Design Experiments to Move the Field
Limitations
Future Studies
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Low-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses.......................... 61
Table 2: Mid-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses.......................... 62
Table 3: High-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses......................... 63
Table 4: Recommended Informational Texts............................................................ 72
Table 5: Changes to Lessen or Eliminate Barriers to Student Agency ..................... 101
Table 6: Low-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses ......................... 109
Table 7: Mid-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses ......................... 110
Table 8: High-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses ....................... 111
Table 9: Recommended Informational Texts .......................................................... 126
Table 10: Consultant Recommendations ............................................................. 134
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptualization of Third Space Theory……………………………………180

Figure 2: Conceptualization of Shared Spaces in Classrooms—Points of Entry………… 182
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>Common Core State Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGAC</td>
<td>National Governor’s Association Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSSO</td>
<td>Council of Chief State School Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLT-RID</td>
<td>Office of Learning &amp; Teaching, Research &amp; Innovation Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

Seeking New Agents for Reading in High Schools

“Adolescents are, after all, the major stakeholders in their education, and we, the adults, need to listen to what they have to say.”
(Pitcher et al., 2007, p. 395)

Surveys of middle school and high school students suggest that interest in reading declines as students progress through school (Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007; Strommen and Mates, 2004). Nippold et al.’s (2005) survey of 100 sixth graders and 100 ninth graders found that 64% of sixth graders marked reading as a desirable activity, while only 37% of ninth graders did. This shift in attitudes toward reading begins to appear at around fourth grade, a time when many schools shift their focus to reading informational texts and “reading to learn” (Chall, 2000). Informational texts, which are generally defined as non-fiction writings, gain importance for students’ academic success as grade levels advance (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). By the time students enter high school, textbooks, which students describe as boring, are the primary source of reading (Guthrie & Klauda, 2012). Even adolescents who say they enjoy reading report that they dislike the texts they are typically assigned to read for school (Black, 2009; Howard & Jin, 2004).

Although surveys suggest declines in reading interest over time, follow-up interviews reveal that adolescents who claimed to dislike reading on the surveys actually read regularly outside of school hours for their own interests and purposes (Pitcher et al., 2007; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Pitcher et al. (2007) surmised that students may equate questions about
reading on the survey with the reading they are assigned in school, and not with the types of reading they enjoy outside of school. Consider the comments of Samantha, a ninth-grade student in Strommen and Mates’ (2004) study, who illuminates why the informational texts typically assigned in high school may actually diminish older students’ interest in reading:

I just don’t enjoy reading books and textbooks. I mean they’re easier to read than primary documents and it’s better than learning from the activities we do, but I don’t enjoy reading them. It’s become a chore. It’s just not pleasurable. It’s so fact filled and you have to know everything—knowing that I have to know everything for a test. (p. 197)

Perhaps the decline in reading interest for older students is less a dislike of reading, and more a mismatch between the texts and purposes for reading in school and the texts and purposes for reading that naturally motivate students to want to read (Ivey, 1998).

Further complicating the situation, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) recently adopted in forty-five states require a greater focus on informational texts at all grade levels (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGAC-CCSSO], 2010). According to the CCSS for English Language Arts (ELA) ancillary documents, by the time students reach their senior year in high school, 70% of what they read in school should be informational rather than fictional. Furthermore, text complexity levels by senior year should be comparable to college-level texts. The higher complexity levels will be especially challenging for students already struggling to understand the texts they read in high school; however, adolescents’ lack of engagement in school-based informational reading may prove to be the greater challenge. Essentially, at the same time students need to devote more time and effort to reading complex informational texts, they are less likely to want to.
The problem is multifaceted to be sure, but one important consideration is how teachers select the informational texts that students are assigned to read and study. When selecting fictional texts for students, ELA teachers can often find novels and stories targeted for adolescent audiences; however, this same criterion is more difficult to apply to informational texts at the secondary level since these texts are often written in forms more familiar to disciplinary experts than adolescents (Moje, 2010). In addition, high school students are diverse in their interests and backgrounds, so ELA teachers are challenged to find and incorporate informational texts on topics that interest all readers. ELA teachers likely choose texts based on several factors, including their own knowledge of texts, institutional constraints on text selection, and their access to texts, which may be inadequate due to costs of materials and limited school funds (Friese, Alvermann, Parkes, & Rezak, 2008). Although textbook publishers, teaching colleagues, and professional publications will offer teachers suggestions for what informational texts should be used to teach the CCSS in high school ELA classrooms, an underused resource for recommendations are the students themselves. To better understand how students can inform teachers’ text selections, this study explored what happens when high school students become curriculum development agents with the power to recommend and negotiate which informational texts their ELA teachers use in class.

**Justification and Significance of the Study**

“An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” –Winston Churchill

As ELA teachers select informational texts that meet the requirements of the new standards, they have a window of opportunity to incorporate more of the engaging texts that researchers say adolescents need to persist and grow as readers (Moje, Young, Readence, &
Moore, 2000). Studies of adolescents’ reading preferences reveal that they enjoy various sources of information, such as magazines and websites (Hopper, 2005; Knoester, 2009; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). They also enjoy reading about celebrities, musicians, pop-culture, and people like themselves (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Pitcher et al., 2007; Warrican, 2006). Although researchers suggest that teachers can rekindle interest in school-based reading by incorporating more of these preferred texts (Pitcher et al., 2007; Nippold et al., 2005), doing so may prove challenging for teachers, since what adolescents value in a text does not necessarily match what teachers value (Alvermann, Huddleston, & Hagood, 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2004). Teachers are sometimes uncomfortable using adolescents’ preferred readings in class because they can espouse values and ideas teachers perceive as counterproductive, disruptive, or offensive within school contexts (Gibson, 2010; Heron-Hruby, Hagood, & Alvermann, 2008). Possibly because of this, most studies that explore using adolescents’ preferred types of reading for literacy learning are conducted outside of the contexts of regular classrooms (Fisher & Frey, 2004; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008; O’Brien, Beach, & Scharber, 2007). Therefore, this study sought to better understand the disconnection between the types of reading students prefer and the types of reading valued by teachers and schools. It also explored the barriers teachers face when trying to incorporate the texts that students prefer in regular classroom settings. How far apart are the demands of the content standards and the preferred texts of students? Can teachers and students negotiate the boundaries between what is and is not deemed acceptable, valid, or worthy of study in a high school classroom?

To explore these issues, I applied Third Space Theory (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) as a framework for considering the disjunctures between the students’ first space (ways of
knowing and doing valued by individual students) and the teacher’s second space (ways of knowing and doing valued by the teacher), with regard to informational text. The hope was that these two spaces could meld into a mutually transforming third space, where both students’ and teacher’s goals were met for text selection and instruction around the text. Such melding would require a shift in the balance of agency between students and teacher. Bandura (2001) described agency as the power to “intentionally make things happen by one’s actions” (p. 2). In a typical classroom, the teacher maintains much more agency for making decisions about curriculum than students (Friere, 1986). To allow for more student agency, this study facilitated the opening of a space for negotiation between the teacher and students about what types of informational texts could be both acceptable and effective for reengaging high school readers. By employing a design experiment approach (Brown, 1992), which allowed for two study iterations and adjustments to classroom procedures, the study sought a process and set of circumstances capable of producing a mutually beneficial third space for the teacher and students around informational texts.

This study also introduced a new way of leveraging student choice to potentially increase student engagement. Studies show that reading engagement increases when students have some choice in what they read (Guthrie & Klauda, 2012). However, previous studies of adolescents offered students reading choices only for independent assignments and projects (Alvermann et al., 2004; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). Such independent assignments led to increased engagement in reading, but they did not involve students potentially changing what texts teachers use with students during periods of instruction. This study contributes to the literature by exploring how students’ finding and recommending informational texts to the teacher influences reading engagement around informational texts. The study also considers
how teachers’ incorporating student-recommended texts can influence general student engagement during the lesson.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to explore what happens when high school students recommend and negotiate with their teachers which informational texts will be used in an upcoming English language arts lesson. The study considered how the processes of text selection and negotiation influenced teachers’ decisions about texts and students’ engagement around the reading of informational texts. The study also explored the barriers to shared agency and, through a design experiment approach (Brown, 1992), developed and then revised classroom protocols that may serve to lessen those barriers.

**Research Questions**

Primary Research Question:

- What set of circumstances would allow students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum?

Secondary Research Questions:

- How do high school students respond to their teacher’s request to find and recommend informational texts for use in a future lesson?
- What happens when students and teachers negotiate which informational texts will be studied? In what ways can students influence teachers’ selection of informational texts?
- How do choice and negotiation influence the reading engagement of students around informational texts?
○ What are some barriers to student agency, and how can they be lessened or eliminated?

In the next chapter, I provide a review of the literature that begins with an overview of Third Space Theory and how it has been applied in other research, including studies of classroom power relations and literacy. I then use Third Space Theory as an umbrella concept to connect reviews of the literature on each of the following topics as they relate to this study: teacher and student agency, adolescent readers and reading engagement, and informational texts. In Chapter 3, I articulate the methodology for this study. In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings of the study. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the findings and subsequent implications for teachers and researchers.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Third Space Theory

Origins of Third Space Theory

In his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) explained his conception of Third Space Theory, which he used to describe how formerly colonized people resisted limitations imposed upon them by their colonizers. He envisioned third space as the result of production work for establishing “in-between spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (p. 2). The resulting in-between space is called a “third space” because it is the hybridization of two other conflicting cultural spaces, the first space of the colonized group and the second space of the dominant colonizing group.

Within a third space, oppressed people move within systems that already exist, but they also function under rules that they themselves create, which allows them to speak back to stereotypes, establish some breathing room, and examine the first (their own) and second (their oppressors’) spaces from a new perspective (Bhabha, 1994). Such moves can be viewed as the construction of a third space. Since Bhabha introduced Third Space Theory as a way to explain hybridity in post-colonial identities and cultures, the construction of third spaces is often attributed to the subjects of oppression as they adapt and claim agency within the parameters and constraints created by their oppressors. However, Bhabha also
recognized the usefulness of Third Space Theory for understanding the experiences of those in authority as well. As evidence of this, consider the following conversation during Bhabha’s interview with W. J. T. Mitchell (1995), his University of Chicago colleague:

Mitchell: Ideas like this are why I think your writing speaks not only to or for the subaltern or the colonized, but also to and about those who are at least labeled as identifying with the voice of authority, or as belonging to that side, which as you have often pointed out is not homogeneous either.

Bhabha: I have always felt that while I was trying to work out a theory of the resistance to authority, and the subversion of hegemony, on certain colonial and postcolonial grounds, I was in fact also addressing problems relating to other moments and locations of authority. (p. 81)

These comments indicate that Third Space Theory can illuminate moments and locations on both sides of third spaces, the first space of the oppressed and the second space of the oppressors.

Furthermore, Bhabha’s later comments in the same interview indicate that he intended for Third Space Theory to be adaptable to other contexts and disciplines beyond historically colonized locations. Bhabha explained:

It has been my stance for some time now that the histories of colonialism, slavery, indentured labor, gender, oppression, and class stratification—phew...to name only a few!—speak not only of the specific classes or peoples or regions to which they are most obviously tied, but more generally of the social differentiations that constitute modernity—of the everyday of modernity. Colonial or postcolonial or minority discourses, describe them as you like, help us to think through the ways in which hierarchies have been articulated and negotiated within modernity. (Mitchell, 1995, p. 82)

His comments demonstrate that he wanted the theory to be open to translation beyond colonial and post-colonial discourses, which could include, among other things, the power differential between teachers and students in classrooms.
In the spirit of open translation, Soja (1996) extended the conceptualization of Third Space Theory by adding a spatial component and emphasizing how individuals draw from shared physical spaces in ways that are complex and inextricable. Soja’s conceptualization “captures the ‘simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence’ (Soja, 1996, p.3)” (cited in Gannon, 2010, p.23). In this way, shared third spaces can be viewed as influencing and reshaping the first and second spaces of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Soja (1996) further posited that third spaces, while oppositional in nature, may open new possibilities and generate new knowledges. This extension of the concept makes it even more appealing to educational researchers and practitioners who seek to change the power structures within the spaces of classrooms. The potential for third spaces in classrooms using Soja’s translation is that teachers and students can influence each other in powerful ways through mutual learning, which is an important goal in this study of how students and teachers can negotiate choices for curriculum.

**Third Space Theory as Applied in K-12 Literacy Education Research**

Third Space Theory has become a popular theory for examining literacy education in K-12 public schools since the literacy practices in students’ first spaces (families, cultures, peer groups) often contend with the literacy practices in schools’ second spaces. Moje et al. (2004) identified three perspectives of Third Space Theory that are strategically applied to classroom literacy contexts: (a) third space as a way to build bridges to success in school, (b) third space as a navigational tool that allows students to succeed in multiple social and cultural contexts, and (c) third space as a space for challenging and reshaping literacy practice of both schools and students.
The first perspective, represented in the work of Gutierrez and her colleagues (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999), applies third space as a way to build bridges between the dominant views of knowledge and learning in schools and the views of knowledge and learning that are practiced in home communities. This conception of third space is highly related to the funds of knowledge concept, which espouses learning about students’ home communities and incorporating funds of knowledge from their everyday lives in the classroom (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). In another example, Cook (2005) applied this third space perspective to her work with elementary school students. The method involved two steps: students conducted role-plays of situations that happen outside of school, and students and teachers used the role-play situations to co-create related literacy activities. For example, a group of nine-year olds acted out a restaurant scene in which the chef quit and the other employees were forced to deal with dissatisfied customers. Afterward, the teacher led students to write job descriptions, advertise for applicants, and conduct job interviews. Third Space Theory was applied in the study by prompting students to build bridges from the knowledge and experiences they brought from their everyday lives (first spaces) to the literacy learning goals for reading, writing, and speaking in school (second spaces).

The second perspective of Third Space Theory, represented in the work of Carol Lee (1993) and the New London Group (1996), recognizes that third spaces are essential for learning to navigate between multiple types of literacies for different purposes and within different social contexts. In classrooms, traditional forms of literacy (created within dominant majority cultures) are valued over the students’ preferred modes of literacy (created within their peer and home communities). Proponents of this perspective believe that by
building third, or hybrid, spaces in classrooms where multiple forms of literacy are valued, students will be more successful, vital, and effective in our multicultural and multimodal world. An example of a study that applies this perspective is from Benson (2010). Benson studied an adolescent who often refused to complete traditional English language arts assignments, particularly print-based forms of reading and writing. He much preferred multimodal forms of expression, such as creating digital and visual products. During the case study, Benson realized that Bud was actively building his own third spaces to escape elements of assignments he found unappealing and to express his artistic skills and creativity, thereby redefining each assignment for his own purposes. As a result of the study, Benson realized the true power of multimodality to build third spaces:

Rather than being used as a bridge to the knowledge that the teacher sees as truly important, multimodality needs to be recognized as a way to redefine what knowledge is valued. Multimodal assignments thereby become a means of teacher and students creating a third space together, with the teacher recognizing students’ expertise in creating digital, visual, and aural products while also acknowledging that such expertise may not be something the teacher possesses. (pp. 561-562)

Benson’s application of Third Space Theory demonstrates how third spaces can be built through multimodal assignments that incorporate students’ first space literacy strengths.

The third perspective, represented in the work of Moje et al. (2004), is the view that third space be used as a space for conversations about competing knowledges for the purpose of challenging and reshaping academic literacies as well as the literacies of young people. Wiseman’s (2011) study of 8th graders in an urban public school demonstrates aspects of this viewpoint. Wiseman implemented a year-long weekly poetry project where students used hip-hop lyrics as a familiar poetic form to analyze and understand more traditional poetic forms typically taught in school. Students and their teacher used the two forms of poetry as
objects around which to create spaces for critical thinking and to write their own poetry. A student’s poem that came from this project follows:

The stereotypes are running my life  
Bringing much confusion or strife  
I’m stuck in a world where image is everything  
If you don’t have the items then you’re an item of inferiority  
It’s hard to be a child in this material world  
Adults setting so many goals its outta control  
They want you to be what they could not  
And get an education with the power of love  
I’ve haven’t forgot  
But the pressure isn’t helping us at all  
In fact the pressure is making us fall (p. 73)

Through the poetry project, students and their teacher learned to build third spaces where it was safe to question and consider the multiple perspectives represented in the poetry and to engage critically with ideas that were relevant to their lives. As a result, both the teacher and students reshaped their notions of literacy practice. This application of Third Space Theory demonstrates how third spaces can be formed to encourage mutual learning and negotiation between students and teachers.

This study of what happens when students recommend and negotiate choices for curriculum incorporates two of the literacy education perspectives of Third Space Theory as defined by Moje et al. (2004). As with the first perspective, this study sought to build bridges between the dominant views of informational texts (as represented by the teacher and required curriculum) and the students’ views of informational texts (that students bring to the classroom based on their practices at home and with their peers). This primarily occurred through the students recommending texts that they would normally read at home or with peers and presenting them to the teacher for use in the lesson. Centermost to this study, however, is the third perspective of Third Space Theory as espoused by Moje et al. (2004),
which views third space as something that promotes conversations about competing knowledges in ways that can challenge and reshape academic literacies and the literacies of young people. Indeed, this study sought to engage teachers and students in a conversation, or negotiation, about which final text should be chosen for a future lesson, which could result in new understandings about what choices could best serve the goals and interests of both teacher and students, ultimately leading to change in literacy teaching and learning.

**Challenges of Applying Third Space Theory to Studies of Classrooms**

Researchers face challenges when applying Third Space Theory in classrooms. One challenge is that this post-colonial theory, which was born from atrocities of dominance and oppression, seems out of place when used to describe the experiences of classroom students, especially when teachers are working to empower students, or when students come from dominant cultures and are in societal positions of relative privilege (Benson, 2010). Although the theory works in classrooms due to inherent power structures, some readers of educational research, particularly those from a critical theory perspective, may resist or even reject such uses of Third Space Theory in this way.

Of more concern is that Third Space Theory may be misapplied in such a way that educators and researchers claim even more dominance over the space of classrooms. Bhabha (1994) theorized third space as a place where groups subject to authority can subvert that authority and re-appropriate elements of the space into expressions of their own. Indeed students are creating such third spaces without researchers and teachers leading them. Consider the student from Benson’s (2010) study, who found ways to resist the teacher’s more traditional reading assignments. Researchers must be careful that our goals are not to establish more dominance over students. For example, Benson explained that, “Third space
theory can be used within literacy classrooms as a means of better understanding student learning resistance and devising ways to overcome it” (p. 555). Such statements indicate that the theory can be used by those in power to reduce resistance and thereby gain even more control over the subjects of their authority, which was certainly not the desired outcome of this study.

For Third Space Theory to work appropriately in classrooms, teachers—and researchers—should co-construct third spaces with their students with the goal of learning and changing themselves and schools through the process. According to Skerrett (2010), “Radically transforming classrooms to value and use adolescents’ literacies as high status, appropriate tools for deeper in- and out-of-school learning is the ultimate goal of teaching and learning in the third space” (p. 82). Although adults may tout the importance of radically transforming classrooms, this may be easily forgotten in the contexts of schooling, where the goals of adults are afforded higher status. Consider Benson’s (2010) remarks: “Creating a third space shifts the balance of power in the classroom, positioning students and teachers as colearners and coteachers. Such a dynamic has the potential to reduce student resistance, because teachers and students mutually determine what knowledge and products are appropriate to meet both parties’ learning goals” (p. 562). Although Benson acknowledged that students and teachers should be colearners and coteachers, the noted potential is still to change students (reduce resistance). In other words, this technique will help students stop resisting their teachers’ instruction so that students can finally change. However, if building third spaces in secondary schools is to benefit students, adults in charge of school must stop resisting the messages students are sending about what is meaningful to them, so that schools can finally change.
Furthermore, as the theory was originally devised, oppressed individuals construct third spaces to claim their own form of power. In the context of classroom research, however, researchers and teachers lead students to construct third space, which is just another application of second-space authority. So although researchers and teachers may claim that third spaces are built, if the construction is entirely in the hands of the adults, what develops cannot be a true third space as it was originally conceptualized. For example, under the heading “Challenges ahead: Still working toward third space,” Moje et al. (2004) shared an update on their work toward building third spaces:

We are currently constructing curriculum reading materials that include informational texts, case studies of actual environmental action projects that may be based as much in the everyday experiences of particular communities as they are in generalized scientific findings, local and world news articles, and excerpts from the popular cultural texts we have documented youth attending to in homes and peer groups. (p. 67)

Note that the adults were the only ones engaged in construction of the third space, although they were at least informed by their knowledge of the young people they studied and were certainly trying to add elements likely to engage students. Benson (2010) noted that even when researchers and teachers do recognize the importance of building third spaces along with students, the teacher remains largely in control of what happens.

The issues and complexities of using Third Space Theory in classrooms could not be avoided for this study. I as the researcher set the goals and initiated the procedures for building a third space. I was therefore positioned in the classroom as an additional authority figure. However, the study procedures facilitated the opening of a new space where students could assert their own choices and prompt conversations with teachers. In this way, the study offered an important opportunity to consider what circumstances would allow for the building of third spaces around choices for curriculum. So instead of creating a true third
space, the study used the theory as a framework and lens for opening and exploring new
spaces for shared agency to better understand how students and teachers could negotiate
choices for the curriculum in ways that fostered greater mutual understanding between
students and teachers.

To understand how teachers and students can build third spaces together, one must
consider the kinds of agency typically afforded to teachers and students in classrooms. In the
next section, I present a review of the literature on agency in classroom settings, first
addressing teacher agency and then addressing student agency. The studies of agency
reviewed here emphasize how teacher and student agency are inextricably linked and
mutually influential.

**Agency in Classrooms**

Student and teacher agency is an important construct to understand what issues and
barriers may influence the construction of third space within classrooms, particularly in this
case around decisions about curriculum. According to Albert Bandura (2001), “To be an
agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions” (p. 2). Bandura describes four
core features of agency—intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness.
*Intentionality* means that an individual performs an action with the belief that it will produce
a desired outcome (which may or may not be achieved). *Forethought* means that the
individual was motivated by thoughtful anticipation of something in the future. *Self-
reactiveness* refers to the ability to give shape to one’s actions and regulate their execution
over time. Finally, *self-reflectiveness* refers to a person’s ability to examine one’s own
effectiveness and believe that one has some measure of control over events. These four
features of agency together enable individuals to take part in their own development, but only
if the individuals perceive their own self-efficacy. “Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (Bandura, 2001, p. 10). By this definition, for teachers or students to become agents for curriculum and learning, they must believe that they can intentionally make things happen in the context of schools. I will first review the literature on what this means for teachers.

**Teacher Agency in Classrooms**

Agency is a valued commodity for teachers because it enables them “to make free or independent choices, to engage in autonomous actions, and to exercise judgment in the interests of others and oneself” (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). In educational research, teachers are alternately viewed as agents of change (Fullan, 1993), agents of moral interaction (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002), agents of socialization (Campbell, 2012), agents of social justice (Sonu, 2012), or simply agents of professional practice (Ebrahim, Verbeek, & Mashiya, 2011). In each of these views, the teacher’s role in agency is clearly one of importance with regard to what students experience in classrooms.

While the potential for teacher agency exists, studies of teacher agency tend to agree that both external and internal factors influence how much agency teachers actually leverage in their profession (Lasky, 2005; Liggett, 2011; Priestly, Edwards, & Priestly, 2012). External factors discussed in these studies are the social and political climates, government mandates, and school leadership policies that restrict teachers’ choices about curricular and instructional practices. Internal factors discussed in these studies relate to teachers’ internal struggles around compliance with external factors when weighed against their own professional and personal values, beliefs, and identities. Lasky (2005) asserted that the early
influences on teacher identity (an internal factor) and the current reform context (an external factor) mediate teacher agency. Within the current reform context, Lasky found that the combination of negative political tone, decreased resources, and more stringent curricula pressured teachers into changing the way they would normally teach by forcing them to rely on lecture formats and reduce the amount of time they would otherwise spend building rapport with their students, thus illustrating a lack of agency.

**Individual capacity for teacher agency.** Researchers also note that individual teachers have varying capacities for appropriating agency, but that these capacities fluctuate and can be developed (Campbell, 2012; Ebrahim et al., 2011; Lasky, 2005; Priestly et al., 2012). Lasky (2005) noted that as teachers became more certain of their own identities as teachers (the internal mediator), external mediating systems had less of an effect on teachers’ sense of professional agency. Campbell (2012) suggested that a teacher’s agential capacity depends upon how compatibly the external factors, such as political, policy, school, leadership, and curricular contexts, coalesce with a teacher’s internal belief- and value-systems. A teacher’s capacity for agency, then, depends on how well the individual teacher is able to govern their own teaching practices--according to their own belief- and value-systems--within those many contexts. Priestly et al. (2012) concluded that a teacher’s capacity for agency varies depending upon the individual teacher’s ability to mobilize their beliefs, values, and attributes in response to the external conditions, and that this ability tended to be based upon strongly held views about teaching and student learning (Liggett, 2011).

**Agency that both supports and contends with students.** Even when teachers have the capacity to act as agents under external sources of authority, they must also navigate
issues of agency with students (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell 2012; Sonu 2012). Teachers are situated between layers of agency, acting in both subordinate and dominate roles. Sonu (2012) explains that, within the current educational culture of testing and accountability, teachers are held accountable for a dual purpose—to monitor their own production and also to strictly manage the work of their students. Such a dual task can be extremely tricky for teachers since they must act on what they believe students need in light of required curriculum and assessments. In their discussion of teachers as moral agents, Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) note that, “teaching is an activity involving a deep awareness of the significance of one’s choices and how those choices influence the development and well-being of others” (p. 120). Indeed, the responsibility toward students is one that teachers feel keenly (Priestly et al., 2012). As a result, teachers sometimes enact agency on behalf of students to resist policies and mandates that they believe hurt learning and their relationships with students (Lasky, 2005).

Yet in spite of teachers’ best intentions and willingness to resist external forces of mandate and policy on behalf of students, there is no guarantee that the teachers’ choices will go unchallenged by the students themselves (Campbell, 2012; Priestly et al., 2012). Rather, students may choose to enact their own forms of agency in contention with the teacher (Perumal, 2008; Sonu 2012). Furthermore, while teachers and other school authorities may believe that they are acting in the best interests of learners, one could question whose interests are served and whose interests are excluded when learners themselves are not involved in decisions for curriculum (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999). Sometimes teachers and students have very different beliefs about what is important, leading to issues of contention. That is why studies such as this are important to increase opportunities for shared agency and
decision-making, which may then lead to greater mutual understanding between teachers and students, so that choices for curriculum are meaningful and purposeful to both parties. Sonu (2012) sees this as a form of social justice that “cannot be examined simply as a type of curriculum, but rather must be seen as a site in which individuals make streams of difficult negotiations at the intersection of conflicting and multiple ideologies” (p. 243).

**Challenges to teacher agency as conceptualized in the literature.** Researchers challenge current conceptions of teacher agency in the literature and caution against oversimplification (Campbell, 2012; Priestly et al., 2012). They warn that there is no certainty about who is right or wrong in issues of classroom agency. Priestly et al. (2012) criticize how teacher agency is often presented in educational studies as synonymous with change and as something positive. First of all, they challenge the assumptions in some research that change and agency are the same thing. For example, while teacher agency may be exercised to challenge policy initiatives and discourse, it can also be exercised to support the same initiatives. Secondly, they critique many studies’ underlying assumptions that teacher agency, when achieved, is always good. Indeed, they ask the important question “Agency for what?” and suggest that the answer is highly subjective and greatly dependent upon context. Furthermore, Priestly et al. cautioned researchers not to overstate the power of individual teacher agency or the power of society’s forces and structures upon it since both remain in a state of constant flux based on ever-changing contexts. On a final important note, Campbell (2012) recommends that:

…as an extension of their own agency, teachers need to respect the agency of their students as autonomous human beings. In asking themselves what they are trying to achieve in their classroom interactions, teachers need also to consider this from the point of view of cultivating and fostering student agency. (p. 184)
As demonstrated in this literature, teachers experience and enact agency in complex ways. Because they occupy second spaces as both dominants and subordinates within the school community, teachers can at once have much agency and also very little. Although external requirements can sometimes limit the amount of agency teachers have within their professional practice, teachers still have a great deal of influence over what students experience in the classroom. In this layered second space, teachers navigate their professional beliefs and goals through or around the external requirements to make choices that influence students’ experiences. Teacher agency, then, is enacted in ways that can restrict, support, and contend with student agency. In the next section, I present a review of the current literature on student agency, which represents similarly complex issues of power and control within the first space of students.

**Student Agency in Classrooms**

Student agency is an important construct to consider when exploring the potential of third spaces in classroom contexts. Many researchers argue that students deserve more agency in how and what they learn (Basu, 2008; Biddulph, 2011; Brooker & Macdonald, 1999; Comfort, Giorgi, & Moody, 1997). Particularly as adolescents develop toward adulthood in the contexts of schools, they can benefit from increased levels of autonomy and more choice over their high school curriculum (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). However, adolescents may struggle to become agents in their own learning without support from adults in doing so (Biddulph, 2011; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) explain that, without support, students may not easily claim a voice for themselves, especially if this practice was not already part of how they experienced school in the past. They suggest that students will need the capacity to imagine a new social structure, one in
which they are viewed as partners with their teachers and schools, and one that must provide a sense of personal safety to speak or act courageously.

Friere (1986) described the pervasive lack of student agency in schools through his metaphor of the “banking” system of education. He explained that in this system, the students are “‘containers’ and ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teachers. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (p. 71). In describing the qualities of this banking system, he noted, “the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” (p. 73). Few would argue that education has changed greatly since Friere’s treatise was published. Overall, students’ opinions are largely ignored whenever adults plan curriculum or school reform (Biddulph, 2011; Comfort, Giorgi, & Moody, 1997; Lensmire, 1998). If their ideas are sought, it is usually after significant decisions have already been made (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999).

**Student agency and school reform initiatives.** Efforts to provide students more agency in their learning have become popular, especially in the UK and Australia, where public policy and legislation frequently promote eliciting student voice for the purposes of school reform and democratization (Office of Learning & Teaching, Research & Innovation Division [OLT, RID], 2007). Such efforts include consulting primary and secondary pupils to improve teaching and learning, and involving them in the school inspection process (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Biddulph, 2011; OLT,RID, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). One example of this type of work for curriculum development was a project in the UK where students, teachers, and academic researchers collaborated on developing a geography curriculum that framed the study of geography around young people’s everyday experiences (Biddulph,
In another example, 30 students in a California high school were invited to participate in staff development sessions with teachers and administrators for the purpose of curriculum reform (OLT, RID, 2007). In both of these initiatives, researchers noted that the students built stronger connections to the school community and both teachers and students appeared to reshape their understandings of curriculum.

Schools have much to gain from these types of student agency initiatives. Weasmer and Woods (2001) argued that when students are accepted as authorities in planning new initiatives, they are more receptive to the resulting changes. For example, when ninth grade students in South Carolina helped their high school to plan new physical education courses, the results were profoundly different than what the school had traditionally offered. Students were able to choose between courses in gymnastics, team sports, dance, and fitness, which allowed them to develop proficiencies in specialty areas and gave them a greater sense of investment in the school (Weasmer & Woods, 2001). Exercising agency in schools also encourages students to explore new possibilities, construct their own learning, and develop higher-order thinking skills (OLT, RID, 2007). Furthermore, helping students develop stronger voices for school improvement helps them to affirm their personal perspectives, learn to cooperate, and develop skills in negotiation for the purpose of transformation, which prepares them for participation and contribution in larger society (Ranson, 2000). In these ways, student agency initiatives teach students how to leverage their voices for influencing change.

Potential problems with student agency initiatives. Although increasing opportunities for student agency holds promise for school improvement and democratization, some researchers warn about potential problems with these initiatives. Arnot and Reay
(2007) warn that education officials may use superficial student voice initiatives to legitimize reform efforts and draw attention away from social inequities that require more significant changes. For various reasons, simply eliciting student voice will not likely lead to more egalitarian school structures. First of all, school administrators and teachers can be overly concerned with control, thus maintaining adversarial rather than collaborative relationships with students (Comfort, Giorgi, & Moody, 1997). Basu (2008) warns that when students challenge the idea of teachers as the sole classroom expert, there may be consequences for students, particularly if teachers and administrators maintain traditional models of authority. Therefore, any initiatives that advance student voice must also prepare administrators and teachers for shifts to shared authority models. After all, to engage in meaningful collaboration with students, school authority figures must first learn to listen (McKibben, 2004). In addition, school officials will, ironically, need to lead students to develop stronger voices and feel more confident in shared models of authority (Biddulph, 2011). Finally, even if teachers and administrators are willing to share authority and elicit student voices for co-constructing curriculum, they must ultimately answer to government agencies for what is taught in classrooms. Therefore, a substantial sharing of authority with students would also require a shift in education policy (Biddulph, 2011).

As a review of teacher and student agency clearly shows, classroom agency is a complex and ever-shifting commodity influenced by layers of competing forces and interests. Sonu (2012) referred to these competing layers as hidden spaces. If teachers and students can find ways to open conversations about such spaces, it may be possible to transform the quality of learning in classrooms through shared decision-making and greater mutual understanding. In the case of this particular study, the selection of texts for adolescents to
read in school is one such hidden space with the potential for competing forces and interests. This study considers ways to open a space for negotiation around text selection and to increase students’ and teachers’ mutual understanding about which texts can engage high school students in reading while also meeting the demands of the curriculum.

In the next section, I present a review of the current literature on adolescent readers and reading engagement. I begin this section by describing some of the trends and characteristics of adolescent readers. Afterward, I share the recommendations of adolescent literacy researchers for engaging adolescents in school-based reading. Finally, I present the challenges of incorporating the reading choices of adolescents in classroom lessons, a particular goal of this study. Overall, the literature reveals some of the barriers teachers may encounter when seeking third spaces with adolescent students around the types of texts they find engaging.

**Adolescent Readers and Reading Engagement**

As explained in the introduction to this dissertation, one characteristic of adolescent readers is that they tend to lose interest in reading as they progress through school. Several studies noted a decline in time spent reading when comparing younger adolescents and middle school students to older adolescents and high school students (Howard & Jin, 2004; Nippold et al., 2005). Strommen and Mates (2004) observed that many adolescent non-readers (those who reported that they do not read, rather than cannot read) in the suburbs of the U.S. Northeast reported losing interest in reading around 9-11 years of age. It may not be coincidental that the decline in positive attitudes toward reading occurs around the same time schools shift their focus from learning to read to reading to learn through informational texts in the content areas (Chall 2000). If students define reading based on their experiences with
school-based texts, then they may be increasingly less likely to self-identify as readers as school-based texts increasingly fail to engage them.

Another concern for adolescent readers is the low level of reading achievement for many students in secondary-level American schools. Many young people enter high school without having met basic standards of reading proficiency; furthermore, males, minorities, those from families with low-income, and English-language learners tend to perform at lower levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Considering these low rates of reading achievement, along with the drop in reading interest, one could assume that many modern adolescent readers may simply dislike reading. However, studies of out-of-school reading practices reveal that adolescents have rich out-of-school literacy lives (Black, 2009; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008; Moje et al., 2008). While some research suggests reading is a dying pastime, particularly among males as they enter adolescence (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Cohen, 2007; Nippold et al, 2005), studies that broaden views of reading to include text in multimedia formats, such as websites or video games, report that nearly all adolescents read regularly (Knoester, 2009; Hopper, 2005).

**Reading Engagement and Adolescent Readers in School**

Although studies show that adolescents have rich literacy lives outside of school when reading is defined to include multimedia formats, the great challenge is in transferring that engaged reading from outside of school to engaged reading in school. According to John Guthrie (2004), engaged reading is frequent, focused reading that is characterized by intrinsic motivation, strategy use, and social interaction. Students who are engaged in reading have self-directed goals for reading, use strategies for deep understanding of texts, and are likely to discuss their reading with others (Guthrie, 2004).
Achieving this level of engagement with readers in school contexts may be challenging. Most readers, even those who are termed avid readers, report that they are less motivated to read texts assigned in schools when compared to reading texts they select for themselves (Black, 2009; Howard & Jin, 2004; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Therefore, teachers and schools need to be strategic in planning ways to engage adolescent readers in school-based reading. The following sections describe the recommendations of adolescent literacy researchers for engaging adolescents in school-based reading through multimedia, through sociocultural connections, and through elements of choice, agency, and ownership.

**Engaging adolescents in school-based reading through multimedia.** Adolescent literacy researchers have sought ways to use adolescents’ out-of-school multimedia-based reading practices to promote interest and engagement in academic reading. Several studies focus on powerful ways to use multimedia to address the reading needs of adolescents (Alvermann et al., 2004; Benson, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2004; Schofield & Rogers, 2004; Tarasiuk, 2010). Citing the importance of “curricular playfulness,” Schofield and Rogers (2004) encouraged 32 students in an alternative secondary school to move away from print literacies so that they could find their own voices and address the complexities of their world. The researchers found that the students, who previously had avoided reading and writing, were more interested in these types of multimedia texts. As a result of the project, students became highly engaged in creating their own multimedia texts by drawing on their biographies, imaginations, and multiple identities. Frey and Fisher (2004) described how struggling high-school readers from a poor San Diego community explored multimedia related to graphic novels and anime on the Internet to build up their knowledge of multiple
literacies as well as academic concepts such as word choice, mood, and tone. The researchers discovered that students were highly engaged in the multimedia texts, which led students to produce lengthier writings and explore more sophisticated word choice. Tarasiuk (2010), a teacher in Illinois, led her middle school students to make meaning of their novel readings by collaborating on a class wiki and creating digital book talks. Their work prompted students to do more self-directed reading and learning as they added features to their online creations and even made contributions to Wikipedia. Tarasiuk noted that the students appeared more engaged in the reading and that her students’ scores on traditional measures of literacy had risen since she began this work. In another example, Alvermann et al. (2004) cross-analyzed cases of adolescent learners’ engagement with online reading and video games. In one case, Huddleston worked with a student who appeared reluctant to participate until she discovered his interest in professional wrestling through one of the video games he often played. She suggested that the participant research online the traditional plot structures embedded in professional wrestling. After he began studying this topic, he participated in reading and writing with apparently high levels of engagement. In each of these studies, students became more engaged readers through connections with forms of multimedia they enjoyed.

**Engaging adolescents in school-based reading through sociocultural connections.**

One of the strongest motivations adolescents cite for reading outside of school is a desire to connect with others, particularly others who share common backgrounds or interests. To increase reading engagement for students from non-dominant cultures, adolescent literacy researchers have explored ways to help students make stronger sociocultural connections to school-based reading by applying the funds of knowledge approach (Moll, Amanti, Neff, &
The funds of knowledge perspective recognizes that students come to classrooms with a wealth of personal knowledge based upon the activities and cultural practices in their homes. Teachers can learn about their students’ funds of knowledge and use them as the basis for new learning. De la Piedra (2010) applied this approach in an effort to incorporate students’ out-of-school literacy practices in the classroom. The study consisted of home visits, interviews, and observations of students in El Paso, Texas. De la Piedra discovered that the students’ families had a wealth of literacy practices including communications with family, readings of school and legal documents, and studies of the Bible. The students interacted with peer groups through email, webpages, games, school work, and personal notes. Students’ out-of-school literacy practices were incorporated in the classroom by allowing students to read texts in Spanish, research popular culture interests, and to share their ideas with peers in forms that were personally comfortable and included code-switching. As a result of incorporating students’ out-of-school literacy practices, students were more strongly engaged and produced sophisticated texts of their own.

Researchers have also considered how teachers can increase adolescents’ motivations to read by situating the reading within social contexts. Blum, Lipsett, and Yocom (2002) shared how literature circles allowed inclusion middle school students to take risks and communicate within groups about the books they were reading. Literature circles are structured versions of book clubs where students form small groups within which to discuss shared readings. The practice improved the self-determination of students to engage with classroom texts and demonstrated that if teachers can find ways for students to interact within social contexts to examine and analyze texts, there is the potential for greater motivation, engagement, and autonomy in literacy learning. With similar results, discourse membership
motivated adolescent readers in Weinstein’s (2006) study of rap as a literate practice. Discourse membership is a term used to describe informal communities that share a common expertise and interest, such as the membership some individuals share around rap music. By encouraging her students to read, write, and perform rap lyrics, something they were already inclined to do online, Weinstein allowed her students to engage in a pleasurable social discourse within a school setting. She had noticed her students enjoyed rap discourse, and so she incorporated it in her inner-city Chicago language arts classroom. She explained, “Focusing on the intricacies of a genre that gives so many young people so much pleasure, and in which they participate so enthusiastically, can only enrich our understandings of how and why engagements with literacy develop” (p. 281). As the study illustrates, becoming a member of a discourse community can be intrinsically motivating for students, particularly if it relates to something students enjoy.

**Engaging adolescents in school-based reading through choice and agency.**
Adolescent literacy researchers have also increased student engagement in school-based reading by offering opportunities for choice and student agency. Alvermann’s 2001 study of a 9th grade African American male recounted how Grady was completely unmotivated to participate in an afterschool media club. The media club allowed students to examine different types of media and then choose a subject to explore more deeply through reading. At first, the researchers assumed that Grady would not participate. Over time, however, Grady developed a passion for a Pokémon video game that required him to read a gaming manual that would help him advance through the levels of the game. In spite of her first assumptions that Grady lacked something he needed to engage with reading, Alvermann
gave him the agency to make his own choices for reading, which resulted in his becoming an engaged reader for the remainder of the project.

O’Brien, Beach, and Scharber (2007) shared findings of a two-year study of 7th and 8th grade readers in an intervention class. The study demonstrated how three students’ deep engagement in reading and projects of their own choosing served to reposition them in the classroom as competent students. For example, one student chose to read Harry Potter books and write narratives about his own superheroes triumphing over evil. Another student demonstrated a passion for learning about animals, and so chose to research deer hunting and to read Jack London’s (1903) novel *The Call of the Wild.* It appeared that:

…they were so immersed in the activities, that they persevered and developed agency without concern for competence. At the terminus of the projects, however, they reported that they perceived that they were getting better at reading and writing irrespective of whether the formal assessments indicated that they had improved on print-based tasks. (p. 69)

The projects allowed students to make connections between their various lived worlds and allowed them to display many areas of competence, which enhanced their sense of self-efficacy as readers and writers. The results suggested that self-directed projects that allow students to make choices for topics and formats can help adolescents become deeply engaged in reading and writing.

Although choice is shown in this literature to be a powerful way to engage adolescent readers, the type of choice studied involves text selection for individual projects. These studies do not address how teachers and students can share in decision-making around text selection for whole-group study. Therefore, this study addresses a gap in the literature through its study of how students can contribute to text selection that will be part of a whole-group lesson.
Challenges of Incorporating Adolescents’ Reading Choices in Classrooms

Even when teachers are willing to incorporate elements of students’ out-of-school reading practices, the going is not often easy. In the studies reviewed, it was sometimes difficult finding engaging texts for every student, since literacy engagement is highly individualistic (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007). Furthermore, texts of interest to participants were not always readily available (Warrican, 2006). And although adolescents tended to be more engaged by non-book texts, some students still resisted assignments with elements not personally appealing to them (Benson, 2010; Alvermann et al., 2004).

Study authors also noted that popular culture texts often contain language and values that are in conflict with accepted school language and values (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). If educators are to incorporate out-of-school reading practices, then popular culture texts are destined to infiltrate classrooms. Yet pop-culture texts, in particular, pose problems for incorporation into mainstream classrooms. Some graphic novels are problematic because of the texts’ “predominance of violence and sexual images” (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 20). Urban fiction, which can be popular and highly engaging texts for African American girls, is controversial for use in classrooms because of the pervasive stereotypes, vulgarity, and violent themes (Gibson, 2010). Regardless, these same texts offer fertile ground for cultivating important academic literacies and critical thinking skills (Alvermann et al., 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2004; Gibson, 2010; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008; Smilanich & Lafreniere, 2010). In addition, adolescents are going to interact with these texts anyway; educators must prepare them to do so in ways that examine the power dynamics at play, questioning what texts are for and whose purposes they serve (Kalantzis & Cope, 2004). Teachers can work toward improving attitudes about reading in middle schools and
high schools by incorporating and legitimizing more engaging and relevant forms of texts, particularly the types of texts students value outside of classrooms.

However, teachers may not know how to incorporate adolescents’ preferred texts when there are few studies demonstrating how this can be done in actual classrooms. The current literature fails to address explicitly how high school teachers can incorporate adolescents’ out-of-school reading practices in their classrooms while maintaining the integrity of their curricula. Most studies that use these texts for literacy instruction were conducted outside mainstream classrooms and therefore did not contend with the types of curricular constraints most high school teachers face when trying to engage readers. For example, of the studies I reviewed here, three were set in after school media clubs (Alvermann et al., 2004; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008; Alvermann, 2001), two were set at alternative schools (Schofield & Rogers, 2004; Weinstein, 2006), two were set in literacy intervention classes (Fisher & Frey, 2004; O’Brien et al., 2007); and one was set in an English-as-a-Second-Language course (De la Piedra, 2010). This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how students and teachers can negotiate choices for informational texts that can serve adolescents’ needs for engaging texts while also serving the requirements of the curriculum.

A final challenge is balancing the use of students’ chosen forms of literacies with the development of important academic literacies. Even when educators attempt to engage adolescents by tapping into their out-of-school literacy practices, there is no guarantee that students’ attitudes and behaviors with regard to required content learning will improve. For example, in the Alvermann et al. study (2004), researchers noted that planned activities fell apart when their adolescent participants were asked to search the Internet to conduct research
about a topic that did not interest them. Certainly, educators will have to require topics and assignments related to content-area learning that may not appeal to all learners. Benson (2010) noted a similar situation when an 11th grader called “Bud” would engage with school work as long as it related to his own areas of expertise. As soon as different areas of reading and writing were required, however, Bud shut down. So although using out-of-school literacy practices in classrooms can be engaging for students, educators must learn more about how to use these same principles to motivate reluctant students to complete important learning tasks that may be less enticing (Gee, 2005; Kalantzis & Cope, 2004).

The literature on adolescent readers and reading engagement clearly defines a major challenge for this study, which seeks in part to increase reading engagement for students through the construction of a third space around informational text. Although students may recommend to teachers the informational texts that they would prefer to read, teachers may judge some of the texts to be inappropriate, or they may face difficulties when trying to fit these within the required curriculum in ways that students still find engaging. To better understand how students and teachers may work toward a third space around informational text, a review of the literature on informational texts now follows. This review includes information about the definitions of informational text, the challenges to engaging adolescents in the reading of school-based informational texts, and recommendations for improving their reading engagement around informational texts.

**Informational Texts**

The importance of informational texts is undeniable. Informational texts comprise the majority of required reading for secondary school students (Moss, 2004; Spires & Donley, 1998) as well as the majority of reading and writing performed in adult life
In recent contexts, informational texts gain even more prominence. The Common Core State Standards call for a greater focus on informational texts and an increase in the difficulty of texts students are expected to read at each grade level (NGAC-CCSSO, 2010). Furthermore, a primary source of reading for many adolescents and adults is the Internet, where approximately 95% of most commonly-visited sites are informational in nature (Kamil & Lane, 1998).

Defining Informational Text

The first challenge for teachers and students is to define exactly what qualifies as an informational text. Few sources agree on the definition, which causes a great deal of confusion (Maloch & Bomer, 2013). In general, people may use the terms informational text and non-fiction interchangeably. Consider how library books are sorted into fiction and non-fiction sections. People would naturally seek informational texts in the non-fiction section. But because non-fiction refers to anything factual (or not fiction), biographies and memoirs are also included in this section. Because biographies and memoirs typically have narrative structures, viewing informational texts as synonymous to non-fiction can create confusion and blur the lines between the different structures of texts. To help students recognize structural differences between informational texts and narrative texts, the definition of informational texts must be narrowed.

Ness (2011) offered such a narrowed definition. According to Ness, informational texts typically exhibit the following characteristics:

(a) the communication of information about the natural or social world,
(b) content that is both factual and durable,
(c) timeless verb tenses and generic noun construction,
(d) technical or content-specific vocabulary,
(e) material to classify and define the topic of interest,
(f) text structures including compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect,
and enumeration/description, and
(g) embedded graphical features including diagrams, indices,
charts, and maps. (p. 28)

Such a definition is useful because it includes the types of informational texts often found in
schools, such as textbooks and trade books, and it excludes narrative texts such as
biographies and memoirs. The definition does not, however, entirely resolve confusion for
students and teachers since it may exclude news articles (past tense), online texts (interactive
reader-driven structures), and procedural texts (such as recipes and manuals), all of which are
important sources of information that students must learn to read and navigate.

The Common Core State Standards (NGAC-CCSSO, 2010) define informational text
more broadly. In the table describing range of text types for grades 6-12, the subheading for
informational text is “Literary Nonfiction.” Examples in the table include the following
subgenres:

- exposition, argument, and functional text in the form of personal essays,
speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, biographies, memoirs,
journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts
(including digital sources) written for a broad audience (p. 57)

Such an expansive view of informational text provides an endless list of options for text
selection in English language arts classrooms, but also requires teachers to master the
teaching of an amazing array of text types, features, and structures to students. Teachers may
understandably become overwhelmed with the different types of informational texts.

According to Maloch and Bomer, “Perhaps the lesson to carry away is not a definitive final
word on what texts are in or out, but rather an understanding that students can be engaged in
an interesting and perpetually uncompleted inquiry process into the different types of text
that exist in the world” (2013, p. 9).
Challenges for Engagement in School-based Informational Texts

Another hurdle for teachers beyond simply defining and identifying informational text is the lack of engagement for some adolescent readers of informational text. School-assigned informational reading is notoriously boring for students (Fordham, Wellman, & Sandmann, 2002). According to Guthrie and Klauda (2012), “Even students who enjoy reading nonfiction often find informational text dry and uninteresting, and many students actively avoid it when possible” (p. 64). In one middle school study, nearly one-half of students, including high achievers and avid readers of fiction, reported that science and history textbooks were intimidating, a waste of time, and unrelated to their lives (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Klauda, 2012).

Perhaps one reason adolescents devalue informational texts and are easily intimidated by them is that they spent the majority of their primary school days reading a steady diet of narratives (Kamberelis, 1998; Kamil & Lane, 1997). If students mainly read stories, they become comfortable with those structures. However, if they also read plenty of non-fiction books, procedural texts, and feature articles, they are more likely to learn the conventions of those types of texts and feel more comfortable reading them (Maloch & Bomer, 2013).

Researchers often note a literacy divide between elementary school, where students are asked to read and write more narrative texts, and secondary school, where students are asked to read and write more informative texts (Newkirk, 1989). This may at least partially explain the so-called “fourth-grade slump” as students shift their focus from learning to read to reading to learn (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Harayama & Mecoli, 2011). It may also partially explain why so many young people claim to lose interest in reading from early adolescence to later adolescence (Howard & Jin, 2004; Nippold et al., 2005).
Although reading experts recommend that teachers incorporate more informational texts, teachers report many challenges to doing so. Ness (2011) found that teachers were concerned about the difficulties related to students’ lack of vocabulary, background knowledge, and familiarity with the text structures. They were also concerned about the students’ lack of interest and engagement and seeming inability to comprehend informational texts.

**Improving Reading Engagement around Informational Texts**

Spires and Donley (1998) recommend that teachers can improve students’ attitudes toward informational texts by helping them to build connections to the informational texts they read in school. One possible factor that contributes to students’ dislike of informational texts is that teachers and students may have a “transmissional” view of reading informational text. The assumptions of a transmissional model of reading are “that the text contains a static message and that the reader is a passive receptor of information” (Spires & Donley, 1998, p. 249). In contrast, when students build connections to their own prior knowledge while reading, rather than simply trying to absorb information directly from the text, they better comprehend what they are reading. The study revealed that building connections to prior knowledge also helped students develop more positive attitudes toward reading.

Guthrie and Klauda (2012) offer additional advice for helping adolescents tackle informational texts. They recommend that teachers help students develop dedication to reading by taking students beyond the textbook to read about a single topic from a variety of texts, such as the Internet, trade books, and journal articles. Doing so allows students to read about topics more extensively and integrate information across texts, often finding inconsistencies that compel students to read even more. Guthrie and Klauda also recommend
that teachers provide concrete reasons for the reading, such as to draw a diagram or prepare for a debate. This helps students recognize the value of informational texts. In addition, they recommend providing students choices about what to read, which gives students a sense of control, allows them to choose a text with personal relevance, and “increases their delight in reading” (p. 67).

**Summary**

In this review of the literature, I described Bhabha’s (1994) conception of Third Space Theory and how the theory could be translated to explore intersections between the second spaces of teachers and the first spaces of students. I then shared Soja’s (1996) extension of the theory that suggests how teachers and students can influence each other through mutual learning in third spaces. I also shared examples of how Third Space Theory is currently being used in classrooms for literacy education. I next reviewed the literature on issues of teacher agency and student agency. I outlined Bandura’s (2001) definition of agency and described the complexity of teacher agency as teachers assume both subordinate and dominate roles in schools (Sonu, 2012). I also shared how students will need adult support and assurances of safety to be confident within shared models of authority (Biddulph, 2011; McKibben, 2004; OLT,RID, 2007). I then reviewed the literature on adolescent readers and reading engagement, which suggested that the decline in reading interest among adolescents may relate to the disconnect between adolescents’ out-of-school reading interests and the types of texts typically assigned for reading in school (Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007). I reviewed studies of how literacy researchers have engaged adolescents in academic reading and also acknowledged the challenges to incorporating student-selected texts in classroom instruction. Finally, I reviewed the literature on informational text, a type
of text that is difficult to define (Maloch & Bomer, 2013) and that sometimes can be less engaging for students (Fordham et al., 2002; Guthrie & Klauda, 2012).

As the review of the literature reveals, this study of how students and teachers can negotiate choices for curriculum involved multiple complex ideas related to how issues of power and agency can influence adolescents’ engaged reading of informational texts. Ultimately, the study sought to identify a set of procedures and circumstances that would lessen or eliminate any potential barriers to student agency when students contribute to decision-making around choices for curriculum. In the next chapter, I present the research procedures and methodology employed to explore each of these ideas.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

To promote new insights into how students and teachers can influence each other in making decisions about curriculum, the study addressed the following primary research question:

- What set of circumstances would allow students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum?

The study also addressed the following secondary research questions. These questions allowed for additional insights while also speaking to the primary research question:

- How do high school students respond to their teacher’s request to find and recommend informational texts for use in a future lesson?
- What happens when students and teachers negotiate which informational texts will be studied? In what ways can students influence teachers’ selection of informational texts?
- How do choice and negotiation influence the reading engagement of students around informational texts?
- What are some barriers to student agency, and how can they be lessened or eliminated?
Study Design

To answer the research questions, I employed qualitative methodology using the design experiment approach (Brown, 1992). The design experiment approach allowed for the procedures in the study to be adjusted as needed in response to the complex social contexts of intact classrooms. Brown (1992) introduced design experimentation as a way to solve a common problem for education researchers—when a new teaching strategy appeared to work within a laboratory setting yet did not yield the same results within real classrooms. Since classrooms could never function as highly controlled settings for research like laboratories, education researchers needed a research method that allowed for the procedures in a study to be adjusted as needed in response to the complex social contexts of intact classrooms. Design experiments thus offered a more appropriate approach to some types of educational research (National Research Council, 2002).

To test a new technique for teaching and learning within classrooms using the design experiment approach, a set of procedures is first implemented within a real classroom. Based on results, the procedures are reevaluated, revised, and then reapplied in an iterative manner within another classroom until producing a usable and effective set of classroom procedures (Brown, 1992; Gorard, Roberts, & Taylor, 2004). Because of its iterative nature, the design experiment approach is often used “to address the question of what the absolutely essential features are that must be in place [to influence learning] under conditions that one can reasonably hope to exist in normal school settings” (Gorard et al., 2004, p. 579).

The use of multiple iterations to improve upon the design was particularly useful in this study, which sought to develop a protocol for student-teacher negotiations around choices for curriculum. The protocol for negotiation was adjusted between iterations so that
it better allowed for students and teachers to influence each other’s decisions regarding text selection.

Another advantage of design experiments is that they provide a structure for participants to contribute to the production of artifacts and procedures (Gorard et al., 2004). In this study of the design, one of my roles as the researcher was to work collaboratively with teachers and students to learn what adjustments to procedures would better facilitate the process of negotiation and how to improve the next iteration.

The design experiment approach also allowed me to explore issues of agency and third spaces within different classrooms and with different sets of participants to better understand how different contexts and participants influenced the design experiment and subsequent findings. This was done with hopes that the resulting design could be used in other classrooms to inform teachers, students, and researchers about ways to increase the levels of collaboration, shared agency, and mutual understanding between teachers and students.

**Classroom Procedures**

The classroom procedures were repeated three times: once during a pilot study with a ninth grade class, and twice during this study with a ninth grade class and an eleventh grade class. The classroom procedures involved three distinct steps, which are described in the next paragraphs.

Step one was to meet with a teacher to (a) discuss and refine the classroom procedures, (b) select a future lesson or unit for which students will select informational texts, and (c) set the plan for introducing the task to students.
Step two was to work collaboratively with the teacher to introduce the task to the students and have them find and recommend informational texts. Although teachers refined how the task was shared with students, the basic elements were to (a) explain that students will serve as consultants to the teacher by selecting informational texts that will be studied in an upcoming lesson, (b) explain Third Space Theory generally and share with students the parameters of the “second space” within which the teacher works, including the goals and themes of the upcoming lesson, information about the CCSS for ELA, and grade level requirements for text complexity and Lexile levels, (c) invite students to consider their own “first space” and how they may represent that space in their text selections, (d) instruct students in helpful online search processes and useful websites, and (e) establish a period of time for students to find and select texts. Based on the pilot study, 30-50 minutes a day over two or three days in a week worked well for the period of text selection, but this was also subject to teacher and student decisions during the study.

Step three was to provide an opportunity for the students and teacher to discuss and negotiate which texts will ultimately be included in a teacher identified lesson. Based on the pilot study, this step in the process needed a specific protocol since neither the teacher nor students in the pilot were comfortable with negotiation, to the point that negotiation did not occur. This protocol needed to be planned so that students were more in control of the negotiation process. With this in mind, the protocol for negotiation initially consisted of four steps, (a) explain to students that the teacher’s initial selections are not final but just the first step toward negotiation, (b) have the teacher present her initial selections and reasoning in a one-page document students could take with them, (c) give students at least one day to process the teacher’s choices and plan their responses for negotiation, (d) devise a plan with
students for how the negotiation will run. For example, the teacher would ask students how they want to express their ideas— in groups, individually, through multimedia, in writing, or orally. Students would also be asked how and when they wanted the teacher to respond to their ideas. Giving students more control of how the negotiation steps would be performed was planned to help them more readily assume roles as agents for curriculum. This would likely be necessary based on the pilot study and the literature, which both suggest that adolescents may struggle to enact agency within school settings without support (Biddulph, 2011; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

As is inherent to design experiments (Brown, 1992), the study was repeated, first with one class and teacher, and then with another class and teacher. I met with each teacher prior to conducting any steps with students, and together we refined the details of how the classroom procedures would take place. Part of this meeting was a discussion of the major concepts and goals of the study. Once the teachers understood the basic process, they helped me to refine the classroom procedures for use within their classes. Once the teacher and students had experienced the process, I asked them to recommend adjustments to the next study iteration. In this way, participants for the first iteration guided adjustments to the second iteration. The primary focus for adjustments was on the classroom protocol for negotiation. I planned adjustments to procedures in order to better facilitate a session of negotiation where both the students and teacher influenced each other’s choice of texts. Once the two iterations were completed, teacher participants had an opportunity to review a summary of the data and provide feedback. This involvement of participants provided member checks, which strengthened my findings.
Participants

The study was conducted at a rural high school in the southeast United States. The school served approximately 1,350 students. Fifty-two percent of students qualified for free- or reduced-priced lunch benefits. In terms of school diversity, 53% of students identified as White, 36% as African-American, 7% as Hispanic, 3% as multi-racial, and 1% as American Indian.

The study participants\(^1\) were teachers and students in two general-level English language arts classes, one ninth grade class and one eleventh grade class. Tenth and twelfth grade classes were avoided since these levels had additional state and local requirements that made time constraints more of a concern for teachers and students. By conducting separate study iterations with first a younger group and then an older group of students, I could explore whether freshmen and upperclassmen responded to the study differently. For example, I could consider whether the older students were more capable curriculum agents, as suggested by Biddulph (2011). In the ninth grade class of 22 students, one student chose not to participate and four more were absent for key elements of the study, leaving 17 participants (six males and eleven females) providing useful data. In the eleventh grade class of 25 students, one chose not to participate, three students were absent for key elements of the study, and four students never returned signed parent forms although they said they wanted to participate, leaving 17 participants (eight males and nine females) providing useful data. The teacher participants were Caucasian, one male and one female. More detailed descriptions of the participants are included in the findings for each study iteration. The

---

\(^1\) Pseudonyms are used to protect participants’ identities. Students selected their own preferred pseudonyms; the researcher selected the teacher pseudonyms.
study participants were a convenience sample since they were teachers and students in a high school in the school district near to where I work and reside.

**Data Collection**

Data collected for this study consisted of student reading attitude survey responses, student questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, classroom observation fieldnotes, audio-recordings of classroom interactions, notes from informal discussions with teachers, and collections of student recommendations and notes.

**Reading Attitude Survey**

Before the classroom procedures began, students completed a reading attitude survey to gauge their baseline attitudes toward reading and to better understand how the two classes were similar or different with regard to reader characteristics. This survey (see Appendix A) was adapted from the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980). I initially revised 11 of the survey’s 25 questions to be more inclusive of reading materials other than books so as to represent more of the types of reading materials the students may prefer. For example, question two of the original survey read, “You seldom buy a book.” I revised the question to read, “You seldom buy something to read.” These changes better reflected the different reading materials that participants would choose to read as part of the study. The changes I made to the questions also reflected recent research suggesting that when study participants equate “reading” to “reading books,” it may lead them to under-represent the time they spent reading (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Moje et al., 2008).

I uploaded the adapted survey into the SurveyMonkey host site, which supported online completion and collection of survey results. The results of the survey provided
information about each class’s overall attitude toward reading and helped me study how individual participants with varying attitudes responded to the process. The results also informed my decision about which students to interview as described later in the chapter.

**Classroom Observation**

I visited each classroom nine times over four weeks for approximately 45 minutes at each visit. Data was collected on six types of occasions for each class: (1) during two class sessions before the classroom procedures began to better understand characteristics of teachers and students, typical teacher-student interactions, and typical levels of student engagement; (2) during the initial introduction of the procedures with students; (3) during times students were searching for articles to recommend; (4) during the class session when the teacher provided her initial selections of texts based on students’ recommendations; (5) during the class session when students negotiated which texts would be included in the lesson; and (6) during the class session when the lesson was taught that included the informational texts students recommended. For all classroom visits and observations, I wrote fieldnotes and made audio-recordings.

Focus of data collection was on evidence of student engagement, both reading and classroom engagement (see Appendix B). To better identify and record elements of general classroom engagement, I used the four engagement indicators from the Classroom AIMS instrument (Fredricks et al., 2011; Roehrig, 2003; Stanulis & Floden, 2009). These four indicators of classroom engagement were as follows:

- staying on task (at least 80 percent of students were consistently on task and highly engaged in class activities)
• self-regulation (students were so self-regulated that disciplinary encounters were rarely seen)
• participating in class (students eagerly raised their hands and participated)
• expressing excitement (students vocalized/expressed excitement about content/activities—lots of ooohs and aahs)

Although the Classroom AIMS instrument did not provide indicators of disengagement, the absence of the above indicators would indicate disengagement. For example, if more than 20% of students were off-task, if the teacher had to discipline students for behavior, if students were not participating in class, and if students were not expressing excitement, this would indicate general classroom disengagement.

For indicators of engaged reading, I used more deliberately Guthrie’s (2004) definition of engaged reading. According to this definition, I looked for indicators of the following:

• focused reading (students intently looked at reading material with apparent extended focus)
• intrinsic motivation (students indicated wanting to find informational texts for themselves rather than for the teacher)
• strategy use (students sought/asked for strategies to find the texts they wanted to read about; students could articulate how they went about reading and selecting articles)
• social interaction (students discussed the articles they were finding and reading with others)
Guthrie, Soloman, and Rinehart’s (1997) characterization of unengaged readers was used as a contrast. According to this characterization, I looked for the following indicators of unengaged reading:

- reading for extrinsic purposes only (students questioned how to earn good grades or comply with teacher requests)
- surface level reading (students read the words on a surface level—skimming, for example—without employing strategies for understanding, or they did not read at all)

**Students’ Text Recommendations**

Data of students’ text recommendations were collected through a Google form (see Appendix C). The form asked students to provide a short description of the informational text they recommend, the link to the text, and an argument for why the text should be included in the lesson. Students submitted a form for each informational text they recommended. Once submitted, the students’ responses were automatically compiled into a spreadsheet.

Using an additional Google form (see Appendix D), students completed a questionnaire that asked them to describe their experiences during the study and to make recommendations for improving the process for students and teachers in the future.

**Teacher and Student Interviews**

Teachers were interviewed for approximately 30 minutes on two occasions: during an initial meeting with each teacher held just after planning the details of the classroom procedures, and during a follow-up meeting with each teacher after the study iteration was completed (see Appendix E). Initial interviews with teachers provided information about
their individual characteristics and beliefs about topics such as teaching, adolescents, reading, student agency, and informational texts. Final interviews with teachers garnered data about the teacher’s experience during the study and suggestions for how classroom procedures could be improved. Student participants were also interviewed to understand how they experienced the study (see Appendix F). After negotiation procedures were completed for each study iteration, six students were chosen for one-on-one interviews that lasted 10-15 minutes each. Students were selected to vary across the following characteristics: reading attitudes based on the survey, gender, race/ethnicity, and whether or not the teacher selected their articles for use in the lesson. Such variations allowed me to interview students who may have had different experiences during the study. All interviews with teachers and students were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Fieldnotes from Informal Discussions with Teachers

While working with teachers to plan and adjust classroom procedures, there were multiple opportunities for informal discussions. The teacher’s comments about the class and how different aspects of the study were going served as rich sources of data. I kept notes from our informal discussions and included them in the data analysis.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to note my positionality in the study as well as its potential to influence participants and the resulting data. In the school where I conducted the study, I spent 17 years as an English language arts teacher. Since that time, I have also worked as a district program specialist for curriculum and instruction. Most recently, and during the study, I worked as the district’s chief academic officer. In this capacity, I have directed academic policy as well as led professional development for school administrators and teachers for the
implementation of new curriculum and instruction initiatives. Since I collected all of my own data for the study, including the interviews and observations, my positionality would have affected the resulting data. Because of my current work for the school district, and also because of my close personal ties to the high school, participants may have produced different responses and behaviors than if I had been someone from outside of our school organization.

In addition, my positionality as a school district leader may have increased my influence on power dynamics in the classroom space. Essentially, the teachers had to join my space and my set of requirements as participants in the study. In this way, I served as an additional authority figure for the purposes of conducting the study. Although this created an unusual dynamic for classroom interactions, providing this externally imposed set of circumstances may actually be required in order to influence change upon traditional roles and power differentials in high schools. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that, given my position, teachers were potentially limited in what they would say and do during the study, thereby affecting the resulting data.

**Data Analysis**

I analyzed all data using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). This method involves four stages: (1) iterative comparisons of incidents related to each category, or code, (2) integration of categories and their properties, (3) reduction of categories, themes, and theory, and (4) refining theory. Progress through the stages was iterative rather than lockstep, and the process ended once thematic saturation is achieved. The constant comparative method was useful for this study because it facilitated a qualitative study of “process, sequence, and change pertaining to organizations, positions, and social interaction”
all of which were particularly relevant to exploring the construction of third spaces in classrooms.

To prepare the data for analysis, I transcribed all data that was not already in a searchable electronic format, such as field notes and interviews. During transcription, I typed notes of initial impressions in the margins to record possible codes and memos about themes. After initial data collection, transcription, and notation, I divided the data into separate tables according to relevance to each research question. The tables served as an initial sorting device subject to further refinement as data was revisited and as codes and themes solidified.

Once all data was collected and stored, I continually reviewed, coded, and analyzed the data until thematic saturation was achieved. Coding was a “progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data…that [were] applicable to [my] research purpose” (Glesne, 2006, p. 152). I performed coding not just for data simplification, but also for data complication, which can serve to “expand, transform, and reconceptualize data, opening up more diverse analytical possibilities” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29). To that end, I sought not only incidents and patterns that validated an emerging theme, but I also sought incidents and patterns that stretched, complicated, or defied a theme.

Because this was a design experiment conducted sequentially in two classrooms, I conducted a preliminary analysis of all the data from the first class in order to adjust the classroom procedures in meaningful ways for the second class. Between iterations, I shared my preliminary themes and findings with the teacher in the first class to confirm the accuracy of my interpretations. I also asked the teacher and students to make recommendations for improving the procedures. After thorough analysis of both iterations at the end of the study, I
shared my findings with teacher participants to reconfirm the accuracy of my interpretations and thereby strengthen findings through member checks.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I kept a researcher’s journal to record my thoughts and reflections. These notes included ideas for codes, subcodes, or themes that emerged separate from specific data documents, but they mainly documented my more personal reactions and thoughts throughout the process. These notes served as a valuable resource for considering my positionality as a researcher, former teacher, and curriculum specialist in the school where I conducted the study.

Once I developed an understanding of themes based upon the data from entire study, I reconsidered the research on Third Space Theory, teacher agency, student agency, reading engagement, and informational texts to see where the literature intersected with and diverged from my findings. In this way, the literature could inform and expand my understanding.

The next two chapters present my findings from the study. Because the study was conducted in two iterations, first in a ninth grade class (iteration A) and then in an eleventh grade class (iteration B), I first present the iteration A findings in chapter four, and then the iteration B findings in chapter five. To begin chapter four, I establish the context of iteration A by describing the teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and class characteristics. Next I answer each of the secondary research questions and describe changes made to the classroom procedures for iteration B. In chapter five, I again describe the context and present the findings from iteration B by answering each of the secondary research questions again. Then at the end of chapter 5, I use the findings from both iterations to answer the primary research question: What set of circumstances would allow students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum?
CHAPTER IV

JUST A LITTLE BIT OF FREEDOM--FINDINGS FOR ITERATION A

“I’m glad that someone is taking time to recognize that we are unhappy and want to voice our opinion.”
(JayGhost, questionnaire response, November 26, 2013)

Before presenting the findings as they relate to each research question, it is important to consider the characteristics of the teacher, the students, and how they interact, to understand the context of study iteration A.

Questions of Control--Teacher Characteristics

“I don’t know that I’m willing to give up that control, and then I don’t know, I just haven’t thought much about that yet.”
(Mr. Allen, interview, November 4, 2013)

At the time of the study, Mr. Allen was an English language arts teacher in his twenties entering his second year of teaching. He had recently graduated with a master’s degree from a state college with the support of a competitive teaching scholarship. Mr. Allen described teaching as a family legacy: “My grandfather on my father’s side was a teacher and coach. Then my grandmother on my mother’s side was a teacher as well. And then I’ve just always enjoyed being at school” (interview response, November 4, 2013). He described his greatest challenges as learning to assert himself and working on classroom management. His greatest successes were, “forging those personal relationships with students” (interview response, November 4, 2013).
With regard to the particular class in this study, his last class of the day, he described his greatest challenges as “trying to maintain that enthusiasm and attention throughout, ‘til the end of the day” (interview response, November 4, 2013). He reported having some success with this class by bringing in props to increase their interest in the reading, such as “when we did ‘The Necklace,’ I actually had a watch and like a box that was kind of nice and shiny, and I showed those like a prop, and you know they remembered that” (interview response, November 4, 2013).

When asked his perception of who adolescents are and what they are capable of doing in high school, he explained:

It seems like maybe they, a lot, most of them that I can tell they have too much self-confidence or not enough. And then, oh yeah, I can do that but then talking big, you know talking in front of their friends just to try to make themselves look good. Then there are others who are kind of shy and hold back and they just need a little extra push. So finding that middle ground there. And then there are some that don’t realize the potential they have and just sort of achieve the bare minimum. I think it’s a lot of, they have too much confidence or they don’t have enough. Trying to balance that out has been an interesting point for me for sure. (interview response, November 4, 2013)

Based on the response, Mr. Allen viewed adolescents as individuals trying to understand and represent their capabilities within the social contexts of the classroom. He also indicated that part of his job as a teacher was to help students figure that out, possibly giving some “a little extra push” to realize their potential. He seemed to believe that his students varied widely in their confidence and behaviors, which complicated his interactions with them.

In order to plan lessons, Mr. Allen typically worked through his professional learning community (PLC), composed of teachers at the school who also teach ninth grade English. He described this collaboration as a “great thing” and “a big help to me that I don’t feel so alone and sort of thrown out there on my own” (interview response, November 4, 2013).
the time the study began, Mr. Allen and his class were studying Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This novel was chosen based on conversations with the other teachers, considerations of what was appropriate, what was available at the district level, and “it just so happens to be that I just plain like the book, so there you go!” (interview response, November 4, 2013). He also considered his students when choosing his material. When asked what role students generally play in planning the curriculum, Mr. Allen explained, “I always try to think about it from—always try to put myself in their place and what they would like. Of course, I would just about do anything just because I always liked English class, so I would just always do it” (interview response, November 4, 2013).

While he did keep student interest in mind when developing curriculum, explicit sharing of agency with students was admittedly uncomfortable for Mr. Allen. When asked in the opening interview about allowing students to choose texts, he shared, “It’s difficult, I think. I don’t know that I’m willing to give up that control, and then, I don’t know. I just haven’t thought much about that yet” (interview response, November 4, 2013). When asked how much independence students had in his class, he explained the following:

Ah, it depends on their behavior. I’m reluctant, just because of some of the low reading levels, I’m reluctant to do collaborative pairs. But I did try that with one class—I might try that with this class soon. If I feel like it’s an important part, then I definitely, you know, take control of the novel up to the point that I definitely take control, and I make sure they understand it. But like if they are coming through a part where perhaps is not as essential then I would feel comfortable with them reading in collaborative pairs, but I would make sure that they understood that they would need to be productive if they wanted to do it again, because most of them would wind up working with something they like and enjoy, and the potential is there for them to get off task, that they understand that if they wanted to do that again, they have to learn that they need to behave themselves correctly. (interview response, November 4, 2013)

His comments indicated that he had concerns about some of the students’ low reading levels and how this would affect their ability to work independently. He also seemed to view their
independence as a privilege that could be earned or lost depending on students’ behavior. Furthermore, he seemed concerned that by giving his students more independence, he risked losing the control he needed to manage his students’ learning and behaviors.

When asked about the prospect of giving students more agency in the selection of texts for one of his lessons, Mr. Allen expressed both hope and concern:

I certainly would love to--matter of fact, I actually did like a research project on that when I was student teaching...I think the issue though is, with this being a semester long class, there’s not a lot of time….I think there’s not a lot of motivation for some of these students when it comes to reading, and so you would have to choose something that would be easily digestible for some of them, because it’s a bit of an obstacle sometimes to really get them engaged in reading, especially for 4th period. (interview response, November 4, 2013)

These comments represented the two main worries Mr. Allen expressed throughout the study: the additional time it took to let students choose their own texts and the students’ lack of motivation for reading.

As for the use of informational texts, Mr. Allen had already used several informational texts with the class prior to the study, including an article about the Duke University Lacrosse scandal in connection with their study of To Kill a Mockingbird. He had also led students in reading an article from the Harvard International Review about Syrian women’s rights in connection with Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour.” Both of these texts had been selected through collaboration with his PLC teacher group. He explained that students sometimes questioned why they were reading the informational texts, and that he was working to change the students’ perception that English class is mainly for reading fiction.

Mr. Allen predicted that the students’ strengths in searching for informational texts would be their skills in the use of technology and their knowledge of real world news, at least in terms of entertainment. However, he also predicted that students would struggle to find
accurate and reliable sources of information. “I’ve done some research with them before, and they’ll use anything they find online…so steering them in the right direction will be the key to their success” (interview response, November 4, 2013). He predicted that another challenge would be “making sure that they are doing what they are supposed to do” (interview response, November 4, 2013). As for the outcomes of the study, he hoped that students would become more confident in finding reliable information online and that he would discover good places online where students could conduct their own research.

A Range of Reading Attitudes—Student Characteristics

The iteration A class was a general level (not honors level) ninth grade English language arts (ELA) class containing 22 students. One student chose not to participate in the study, and four other students were absent over key dates in the study. Therefore, the data comes primarily from 17 students in the class. Six of these students were male and eleven were female. In terms of ethnic and racial diversity, seven identified as White, five as African-American, four as White-Hispanic, and one student as mixed race.

Results of the survey adapted from the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980) indicated a wide range of diversity with regard to attitudes toward reading. The survey allowed for scores that range from 25, which indicates a negative attitude toward reading, to 125, which indicates a highly positive attitude toward reading. The results in this class ranged from 33 to 116. Natural curves in the data suggested that there were three types of readers in the classroom:

- students with low-range reading attitudes (33-46)
- students with mid-range reading attitudes (58-79)
- students with high-range reading attitudes (91-116)
Students with low-range reading attitudes included four White males, one Hispanic male, one mixed-race male, and one African-American female. Notably, all of the male students with full participation in the study fell into this low-range group. The following is a table containing information about each of these students along with their comments about reading from the survey. Note that, in each table, students selected for interviews at the end of the study iteration are marked with an asterisk.

Table 1. Low-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses (November 13, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Survey Score</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Describe how you feel about reading in general. Compare that to how you feel about reading for school.</th>
<th>When or if you choose to read something, what kinds of things do you like to read?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I do not like to read at all an I don’t like school.”</td>
<td>“I might read something on face book or magazines.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>“I don’t like reading but i can listen to a story. I think the books we read at school are boring.”</td>
<td>“I would like to read sport articles or real life actions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabe* 33</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>“If its about something i like, it depends on how long it is depending on how much I read. But otherwise i don’t really like reading.”</td>
<td>“Something that is country like ‘Where The Red Fern Grows.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke 37</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>“I don’t like to read something unless it interests me. i don’t like to read in school because the things we read don’t interest me.”</td>
<td>“I like to read things such as a horror story or a drama or something suspenseful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin 42</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>“I really don’t like reading unless I like the topic we are reading about. In school i don’t think I have a choice about reading, because if I don’t then I will not do well on a test or a paper we have to do on the book after we read it.”</td>
<td>“I like to read about things that interest me. I like to read about Eminem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krisy* 45</td>
<td>African-American female</td>
<td>“I just honestly don’t like reading. Its really boring.”</td>
<td>“Famous people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taco 46</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>“I rather read with some one than by myself.”</td>
<td>“Suspenseful books that keep u thinking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JayGhost* 46</td>
<td>Mixed-race male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students selected for interviews

---

2 All students’ written comments are presented in their original form without editing. Also note that student participants selected their own pseudonyms for the study.
The comments from the students with low-range reading attitudes indicated that the readings assigned in school do not appeal to them. The students equated school reading with negative words such as “don’t like” or “boring.” However, when referring to the types of reading materials they enjoy, such as real-life or suspenseful texts, students used positive phrases such as “I like,” “I might,” or “I would.” Their preferred reading materials, such as suspense books, social media, and magazines, may not be used often in typical high school classrooms.

Students with mid-range reading attitudes included six female students, including two White students, two Hispanic students, and two African-American students. The following is a table containing information about each of these students along with their comments about reading from the survey.

Table 2. Mid-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses (November 13, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student, Survey Score</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Describe how you feel about reading in general. Compare that to how you feel about reading for school.</th>
<th>When or if you choose to read something, what kinds of things do you like to read?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah* 58</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>I don’t like to read at home or at school</td>
<td>about hunting fishing or duck dynasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lusia 60</td>
<td>Hispanic female</td>
<td>I don’t hate reading but I don’t read it for fun I only read at school when teachers tell me to or when we reading a book</td>
<td>If for whatever reason I choose to read it is going to be a fiction because I like reading about non-real things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey 60</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>I don’t like to read.</td>
<td>Things about horses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Jane 68</td>
<td>African-American female</td>
<td>I use to read all the time when I was younger. As I’ve gotten older I don’t find it that interesting. But it all depends on what it’s about.</td>
<td>Biographies about Marilyn Monroe Tina Turner, Reese Witherspoon, Bob Marley, Ziggy Marley, Grace kelly, mostly people I look up to or I know a lot about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeAnn 68</td>
<td>African-American female</td>
<td>I have mixed feelings in general and in school.</td>
<td>Some things I would like to read is a ghetto teen high school book like bluford high and Sharon draper books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica 79</td>
<td>Hispanic female</td>
<td>Reading is good for you but many people don’t like reading. I read when I feel like it and it depends on how much I like what I’m reading.</td>
<td>I like to read things that aren’t real. Like the twilight saga and the hunger games i love reading those kinds of things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students selected for interviews
The comments from students with mid-range reading attitudes indicated mixed feelings about reading. Again, their preferred reading materials, including pop-culture biographies and teen fiction series, are also unlikely to be taught in high school classrooms.

Students with high-range reading attitudes included four female students, including one African-American student, one Hispanic student, and two White students. The following is a table containing information about each of these students along with their comments about reading from the survey.

Table 3. High-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses (November 13, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student, Survey Score</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Describe how you feel about reading in general. Compare that to how you feel about reading for school.</th>
<th>When or if you choose to read something, what kinds of things do you like to read?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jellie 91</td>
<td>African-American female</td>
<td>I like reading but some books at school are boring and doesn’t really catch my attention.</td>
<td>I like reading about peoples life and things they go through and advice book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xochitl* 100</td>
<td>Hispanic female</td>
<td>I like to read. It make me forget about some bad things that are going on in life with me.</td>
<td>I chose to read this about kids that have problems so I can see that there are worse things out in the world than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody* 115</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>Reading for me is one of the best things. Whether it is an article or book, it’s just nice to do. You can expand your vocabulary and knowledge, and for me, find out more on world events that’re happening right now and be able to talk about them in detail. I feel the same way about reading for school, so far I’ve liked all the books I’ve read in school.</td>
<td>I like reading about real world events. Politics, society, or mainly things that make the world go into an uproar; i.e., Columbine, 9/11, and political affairs. I like knowing about them and being able to discuss them or say the correct facts on them. I like knowing why they’re a big deal and I like to be able to form my own opinions on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skylar 116</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>Reading takes me to another place when I can escape from my problems. I don’t think I can go a day without reading for hours trying to go into another world in my mind.</td>
<td>I usually pick things like the hobbit, harry potter, shiver, warrior cats, Eragon and anything to do with a magical world or mythical things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students selected for interviews

The comments from students with high-range reading attitudes demonstrated some strongly positive feelings about reading. Although some of their preferred reading materials may
clash with typical school-based texts, such as books from popular series such as *Warrior Cats*, many of the items mentioned could be found in high school classrooms, such as articles about politics, books about people’s lives and problems, and critically acclaimed books such as *The Hobbit*. The results from the survey suggest that students who have positive attitudes toward reading may also have preferences that fit more closely with the types of readings typically assigned for school.

**A Tale of Two Classes—Class Characteristics**

I conducted two observations of the class before the study procedures were initiated to gather information about the setting of the study, the participants’ characteristics and interactions, and students’ levels of engagement. Between the two visits, I noted a stark contrast. It seemed that the class of ninth grade students from iteration A could appear to be two different groups of students, either intently focused or completely disengaged.

When I arrived for my first visit to observe the class, all 22 students were extremely quiet. They were working independently in several long neat rows at their desks. Every pair of eyes was staring at the computer screens of their student laptops. The room was decorated with several posters: 10-Steps to Success, Life is Full of Choices, Traits of Good Writing, Radiohead, and a life-sized William Shakespeare. An essential question was written on the board, “EQ: How can I identify and analyze themes in other people’s lives?” Their assignments were listed to the side of the board: “Warm up, MLA Research, Paper writing time!” In the center of the whiteboard was the research paper outline:

- Background info/Thesis
- Struggle #1
- Struggle #3
- Accomplishment #1
- Accomplishment #2
- Conclusion (fieldnotes, November 7, 2013)
Students were writing research papers on a person of their choice. On their laptop screens, I saw images of famous people, including music performers Eminem and Will.i.am. Five students had headphones or earbuds in, listening to music or watching videos related to their subjects. Students seemed intent on finding information and switched their screens back and forth from websites to the documents they were typing. Mr. Allen walked around the room reminding students to save their work and letting them know how much time was left. Students seemed reluctant to stop what they were doing, so Mr. Allen had to force some of them to put away their laptops because the bell would soon ring. He commented, “I’m real pleased with what you all were able to accomplish today” (fieldnotes, November 7, 2013). As students put away their laptops, they talked to me with excitement about their research topics including Marilyn Monroe and Tupac Shakur.

Based on this observation, students met several indicators of engaged reading (Guthrie, 2004); they demonstrated extended focus on their reading, they appeared to want to find this information for themselves rather than just for the assignment, and they enjoyed telling others about what they were reading. They also demonstrated several of the engagement indicators from the Classroom AIMS instrument (Fredricks et al., 2011; Roehrig, 2003; Stanulis & Floden, 2009); 100% of students were consistently on task and highly engaged in class activities, students were self-regulating their own behavior, and they expressed excitement to me about their research topics. (See Appendix B to view all observation protocols for engagement.)

In comparison, I hardly recognized the class on my second observation. When I arrived, Mr. Allen was reading aloud the (fabricated) “King of England’s response to
Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence.” This assignment was written on the board:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.”
What do you think this means for America? Does this statement still reflect America today? Explain yourself using the Declaration of Independence.
(fieldnotes, November 12, 2013)

As Mr. Allen read the King of England’s response and paused occasionally for discussion, several students were off-task. Two girls talked to each other across two rows of seats through nearly the entire teacher presentation. Three students in the back of the room were talking to each other. One student sat with his face down on his desk and his hood up over his head. Two other students had their heads on desks with their eyes closed. Only a few students, four to six at any one time, looked at the teacher or the text.

After reading the King of England’s response, Mr. Allen showed a short video of Whitney Houston singing the “Star-Spangled Banner” during a past Super Bowl game. Mr. Allen explained that it was in honor of soldiers returning from war, and he asked students to watch the video and think about what made it patriotic. During the video, students who had their heads down kept them down. A student sitting behind me lip-synched the entire song, and several girls giggled as they watched his pantomime. When asked again what made this patriotic, several students volunteered answers—“singing the anthem” and “flags”
(fieldnotes, November 12, 2013). Through the brief discussion, four students kept their heads down, and several others kept up private conversations. When the teacher gave students a vocabulary worksheet containing blank Frayer model diagrams on both sides,

3 A Frayer model diagram is a graphic organizer that prompts students to place a word in the center and then provide definitions, characteristics, examples, and non-examples in the outside corners.
students seemed to regain their focus. Mr. Allen told students to write the word “patriotism” in the center and then complete the diagram. During this observation, and over the course of my many visits, I noticed that the students demonstrated greater focus when they had work to complete, but much less focus during most teacher led presentations and discussions.

As the discussion of the Frayer model diagram continued, students demonstrated disengaged behaviors once more. Eight students chatted and communicated with each other around the room. Four students kept their heads down. Still, a small number of students tried to participate. Once again though, when students were given time to work on sentences about patriotism using other related vocabulary words, they nearly all returned to on-task behaviors.

These initial observations suggested that two sets of circumstances influenced engaged student behaviors for this class, one being whether or not the task was personally meaningful for students (as demonstrated when students had a choice of who to write about for their research paper while working on their laptops), and another being whether there was a written task to be completed (completing a worksheet or writing the research paper). These two sets of circumstances influenced students’ behaviors during the study as well.

What follows are the specific findings from study iteration A as related to each secondary research question. Afterward, I share initial considerations of the primary research question and how the initial answers to these questions led to changes in classroom procedures for iteration B.

**Cycling Back to Enthusiasm—Findings for Secondary Research Question #1**

*How do high school students respond to their teacher’s request to find and recommend informational texts for use in a future lesson?* To answer this question, I
describe what happened during key elements of the students’ search for informational texts, including the introduction to the task, the search for informational texts, and the students’ resulting recommendations.

**Introduction to the Task**

Before initiating the procedures with students, Mr. Allen and I had discussed the best way to introduce to students the task of recommending texts. We decided that I would begin by explaining Third Space Theory, and then he would present the important ideas from his second space in order to help students understand the types of informational texts he needed for the ELA lesson. On the day of the study then, Mr. Allen and I stood together at the front of the room. He asked for students to give me their attention, and he stood to the side as I began with students by drawing a large Venn diagram on the board to explain the concept of Third Space Theory. I explained that the left circle represented the first space of students and what they know and care about. I explained that the right circle represented the second space of the teacher and what he knows and cares about for teaching the class. I then drew an arrow to the middle space where the two circles overlapped. I explained that this spot represented a third space, where both the teacher and students have their needs and interests met. I then reminded them that Mr. Allen was going to get their help in finding information texts for a future lesson, and that they should try to find informational texts that represented their first space but that could potentially work for Mr. Allen’s second space when teaching. The students appeared attentive during the presentation and indicated that they understood the ideas I presented.

---

4 A Venn diagram is a drawing of two side-by-side circles that overlap.
Afterward, Mr. Allen asked students to open their laptops and look for an email he had sent them. The email contained a link to a document I had created called “Guide for Recommending an Informational Text” (see Appendix G). This document gave students information to guide them through the recommendation process. Once students had time to find the document, Mr. Allen used it to introduce students to his second space teaching goals. Mr. Allen explained that he needed informational texts for the *To Kill a Mockingbird* unit, so students would need to think about how he could relate their chosen texts to themes in the novel. Afterward, he used the links to show students a definition of informational texts and what the Common Core required for high school students as far as text complexity. Then I demonstrated to students how they could check the text complexity of an informational text by running it through the Lexile Analyzer software at Lexile.com.

Next, I reminded students that, although they should keep the teacher’s second space guidelines in mind, they should first look for informational texts that met their own first space goals, considering only the texts that they find interesting and meaningful. I showed them a Symbaloo, a free webmix service that allows users to create tiles that link to chosen sites, where they could begin their online search. I had set up the Symbaloo with links to online searchable sites such as the *New York Times, Us Weekly, HuffPost Teen, National Geographic* and *Sports Illustrated*. I also informed students that they could conduct additional searches through Google or another other search engine they preferred. Our presentation to students had taken about 20 minutes, leaving 20 minutes for the class to begin their searches for day one.
The Search for Informational Texts

At this point in the process, when students began searching for informational text, students could be described as enthusiastic. For several minutes, students searched the sites and texts according to their own interests. All students seemed engaged in the search, as evidenced by all students being on-task, self-regulating their behaviors, and expressing excitement about some of the texts they were finding. Toward the end of day one, many students were hesitant about whether they were finding good informational texts, and they sought our approval and reassurance. Several students called me or Mr. Allen over to their desks for help. A typical interaction was like when JayGhost called me over to look at an article he found about Kobe Bryant recuperating from an injury. He said, “What about this one—will this work?” (personal communication, November 14, 2013). I asked him if he liked the article and if it met his first space goals. He said it did. Next I asked him how he thought Mr. Allen could relate it to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He hesitated for a bit and then explained, “Well that girl in the book—when she got beaten up, she had to recover from her injuries too” (personal communication, November 14, 2013). I told him that it was indeed a connection and that he could try submitting it to Mr. Allen. Students had similar types of questions around the room. Most of them readily found informational texts they wanted to read, but they were unsure about how to connect them to the novel unit and whether or not they were doing the process correctly.

This same type of searching continued during the last 30 minutes of class on the following day as well, but students expressed more confusion on day two. Once students found an informational text that they enjoyed and that they felt would work for Mr. Allen, they were confused about the next steps for recommending the text. Mr. Allen and I
circulated the room prompting students to look back to the guiding document. The most confusing element was submitting articles to the Lexile Analyzer. The use of this tool had gone smoothly during the pilot study, but it now required two additional steps to complete due to changes on the website. Since the first texts students had managed to analyze through the tool met the text complexity requirements or at least came close, Mr. Allen and I told students to skip the Lexile Analyzer step. Once we eliminated this step, the process went more smoothly. Although some students still struggled to make connections to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, other students learned to type in searches that combined their own interests with a theme in the novel. For example, Jellie searched for “racism” and “fashion,” which led to an informational text about the band No Doubt having to remove a music video after allegations that it was racist toward Native Americans.

By the third and last day of article searches, students were experiencing success—with one exception: Krisy. Although Krisy had been off-task during some of my visits to the class, she had worked intently to find an informational text during the study. She wanted to find an informational text about shoes, particularly about the latest fashion trends. But by the end of day two, she was close to giving up. She complained to me that she all she found were advertisements, step-by-step instructions for making shoes, or just pictures of shoes with little information. She and I both began looking on day three, but to no avail. By the end of day three, she resorted to searching for something about rapper Jay-Z and submitted an article to Mr. Allen about alleged racism at Barneys department store. In this way, she went from frustration to compliance, but was never able to assert her own first space goals.
**Students’ Recommendations**

After three days of searching for about 30 minutes a day, most students had found informational texts that they then recommended to Mr. Allen. To recommend a text, students used a Google form (see Appendix C) that asked them for their names, the title of the text, a link to the text, a brief description, a justification for the recommendation, how the text is different from what they usually read in school, and how they found the text. Eventually, students recommended 15 different informational texts to Mr. Allen, including two submitted by Xochitl. Students who did not submit a text were absent from class for one or more days during the search. The following table lists what informational texts students recommended to Mr. Allen in the order they were submitted, including why they recommended the texts and how they perceived the texts as different from what they typically read in school.

**Table 4. Recommended Informational Texts (form submissions, November 14-15 and November 20, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Students’ Justifications</th>
<th>How Different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>Phillips, D. (2012, September 28). <em>All the missing horses: What happened to the wild horses Tom Davis bought from the govt?</em> ProPublica. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.propublica.org/article/missing-what-happened-to-wild-horses-tom-davis-bought-from-the-govt">http://www.propublica.org/article/missing-what-happened-to-wild-horses-tom-davis-bought-from-the-govt</a></td>
<td>Wild horses are like the gang in Maycomb trying to hurt Tom Robinson. Also there are only very few people have the patience to tame these majestic animals like Scout tamed the gang. Tom Davis is a longtime advocate of horse slaughter just like most of the law is former KKK people trying to be in control.</td>
<td>It has more to do with what we enjoy than what we do not enjoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Waite, E. B. (n.d.) <em>Scoring the barnacle buck.</em> TheWaiteGroup.com. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.thewaitegroup.com/dads/barnicleback/score.html">http://www.thewaitegroup.com/dads/barnicleback/score.html</a></td>
<td>this is because it tell you BOUT HUNTING it is my life and i would do anything to get kids in hunting. and it tell you about deer.</td>
<td>because its something i love and like .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>News One Staff. (2011, July 12). 5 most unjust convictions of Black men that were overturned” NewsOne for Black America. Retrieved from <a href="http://newsone.com/1373205/exonerated-black-men-released-from-prison/">http://newsone.com/1373205/exonerated-black-men-released-from-prison/</a></td>
<td>The article relates to To Kill A Mockingbird because Tom Robinson is accused of raping Mayella and gets accused of being guilty. The trial goes on for awhile. He ends up dying, but I feel like after a few years, they would’ve seen he was innocent and overturned his sentence.</td>
<td>It talks about the racism in them specifically, and talks about it in real talk instead of trying to make it sound better then it actually does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JayGhost</td>
<td>NBA News Staff. (2013, November 16). Lakers' Bryant returns to practice with teammates. <em>NBA News</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.nba.com/2013/news/11/16/lakers-bryant-back-at-practice.ap/">http://www.nba.com/2013/news/11/16/lakers-bryant-back-at-practice.ap/</a></td>
<td>i think it should be in the teachers lesson because its something i like and it could be within the requirements. it also relates to the novel that we are already reading, because it is about a person getting injured and then over coming it to play in the NBA. in the story there is a girl that is beaten.</td>
<td>it is different because i like basketball so why not read about one of the greats. and then it could motivate others to go after their dreams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Lucas L., &amp; Siemaszko, C. (2013, November 20). George Zimmerman bailed from jail for assault, served for divorce on same day. <em>New York Daily News</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/18/changes-in-their-partner.html?ref=style&amp;_r=0">http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/18/changes-in-their-partner.html?ref=style&amp;_r=0</a></td>
<td>This article is a great article to improve students lexiile level. This also relates to &quot;To Kill A Mockingbird&quot; because of the big trial that goes on in the book. The article is also recent and what is going on right now in real life. This also something that is interesting to us students.</td>
<td>Our articles are usually very lame. The articles are very boring not that interesting. We read things that teenagers dont care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Fahim, K., &amp; Kirkpatrick, D. (2013, November 21). Egyptian soldiers killed in Sinai attack. <em>The New York Times</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/21/world/middleeast/egyptian-soldiers-die-in-sinai-attack.html?hp&amp;_r=0">http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/21/world/middleeast/egyptian-soldiers-die-in-sinai-attack.html?hp&amp;_r=0</a></td>
<td>I think that it's important what's happening around the world. And who is fighting for us or helping us. This is like book we are reading because he was trying to help the other man.</td>
<td>Well we really don't read this kind of things we learn more in history about this but it was like in the past. But nothing that it's present now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeAnn</td>
<td>Bentley, L. (2010, December 2). Racism alive and swell in NFL. <em>FANHOUSE for SFGate.com</em> Retrieved from <a href="http://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/Racism-Alive-and-Swell-in-NFL-2387503.php">http://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/Racism-Alive-and-Swell-in-NFL-2387503.php</a></td>
<td>I think it should be in the teachers classroom it different because it based on something that is happening in present time</td>
<td>You talk about boring things in school and this is something fun to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke</td>
<td>Scalici, M. (2013, November 14). Nations top defensive end Da'Shawn Hand commits to Alabama. <em>AL.com</em>.</td>
<td>It talks about football and how you have be a good student in school to play. It relates to the book because dell wants to play for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The texts students recommended largely reflected the reading interests they described in their survey comments. Several students’ submissions and justifications indicated that the students asserted their own first space goals with less care for whether or not it related to the teachers’ second space goals. For example, Hannah recommended an article about a special type of deer hunted for its unique antlers, Mary Jane recommended a Wiki page that analyzed characters from The Lion King film, Gabe recommended a blog about bass fishing, and Austin recommended an article about ghost sightings in an old prison now used for filming a television show. The students indicated that their reasons for recommending the texts were simply that they liked it or found it interesting, but they did not make a connection to To Kill a Mockingbird, except for Mary Jane’s short comment that Scar was a bad person like a character in the novel. Other students’ submissions appeared to be reaching farther toward the teacher’s second space goals. For example, LeAnn recommended an editorial about racism in professional football, and Melody recommended a text about Black men who had been unjustly convicted of crimes. In both cases, the students justified their choices based on how the texts will support the teacher’s goals and not how they relate to personal interests. When explaining how their recommendations were different from what they typically read in school, many students demonstrated enthusiasm for the texts they had selected. Many commented that their selections were interesting rather than boring and that they referred to
events in present time as opposed to the past. For Hannah, the difference was simply, “because its something i love and like” (form submission, November 20, 2013).

So how did high school students respond to their teacher’s request to find and recommend informational texts for use in a future lesson? Enthusiastically, as evidenced by the observation of their initial excitement when finding texts they enjoyed online, and by many of their comments on the submission form. However, many students transitioned to confusion (when they had questions about the steps for making recommendations) and hesitancy (when they wanted reassurance that their reading selections were acceptable) during the process of finding and recommending informational texts. Ultimately, most students found informational texts that they wanted to read and recommended them to the teacher, and students’ comments on the recommendation forms indicated that they had transitioned back again to enthusiasm for the texts they recommended.

**Teacher Knows Best—Findings for Secondary Research Question #2**

*What happens when students and teachers negotiate which informational texts will be studied? In what ways can students influence teachers’ selection of informational texts?* To answer this question, I first describe the protocol for negotiation in iteration A and share what happened during the negotiation process. Afterward I consider how the protocol for negotiation supported improvements over the pilot study but also revealed continued limitations to students’ ability to influence significantly their teachers’ selection of informational texts.

**Protocol for Negotiation**

As a design experiment, a primary goal of this study was to develop a classroom protocol for negotiation between students and their teacher. The ideal classroom protocol would be one
that would facilitate a session of negotiation where both the students and teacher influenced each other’s choice of texts. In the pilot study, no protocol was in place for negotiation, and neither the teacher nor the students knew what to do. Some students were angry that the teacher did not choose their texts, and the teacher very quickly closed the discussion before students had an opportunity to negotiate. So for study iteration A, the following four-step protocol for negotiation was used: (a) explain to students that the teacher’s initial selections are not final but just the first step toward negotiation, (b) have the teacher present his/her selections and reasoning in a one-page document students could take with them, (c) give students at least one day to process the teacher’s choices and plan their responses for negotiation, (d) devise a plan with students for how the negotiation will run. My goal for this protocol was to give students more time to plan their comments for negotiation, possibly lessening the initial emotion connected to whether or not their text was selected. The goal for part (d) of the protocol was to give students more control over the negotiation proceedings.

What Happened During Negotiations

Before the negotiations protocol with students began, Mr. Allen took time to review each of the student’s recommendations. After he made his initial selections for use in a future lesson, he invited me to return and observe the class as they participated in negotiations. As planned for the protocol, the following steps were taken: (a) Mr. Allen explained to students that his first selections were not final and that students would have an opportunity to negotiate any changes they wanted to the list. For example, students could suggest that he remove any texts from the list that they did not like or that he consider adding a different text to his list. (b) He also gave students a one-page document that listed his four
initial selections and reasoning. He added writing space for students to “make a case for why your article should be used” on the bottom of the form (see Appendix H). Then, (c) students had time over the weekend to review the teacher’s selections and plan their feedback on any changes they wanted to be made. And finally (d), I asked students to plan how the negotiations would happen. In other words, I asked if they wanted to communicate their feedback to Mr. Allen in writing, verbally in class, or through email, as just some possible examples. The students decided that they wanted a choice; some students would put their ideas in writing, and other students preferred to just speak openly when they returned to class on Monday. In that way, students decided as a whole group that they did not have to complete the written explanation on the form Mr. Allen had given them if they did not want to. In another stroke of boldness, students declared that after they shared their feedback with Mr. Allen, that he should present his final decisions in a PowerPoint presentation to students the next day.

On the following Monday, the negotiations of which texts would be selected for use in an upcoming lesson were supposed to begin the last 30 minutes of class; however, students were still working on an assignment on their laptops, and Mr. Allen stopped them for negotiations with only 15 minutes left in the class. Surprisingly, Mr. Allen spent the first several minutes summarizing each of the texts he had selected. He then gave another appeal for why he chose these informational texts and not others:

So we’re touching a lot on racism, and we’re touching a lot on inequality. And the ones that I chose, their explanations fit in the best with that, and I felt like I could really use those in class. Now other people that I thought were interesting but didn’t really tie their articles well to the text, say like oh this character did this in the book but it didn’t really fit in with the theme. So I say—“Oh, so I chose this article about this topic, because this character did this in the book.” Well, that’s great. And I’m glad you made that connection, but I did not see how in terms of what we’re talking about it terms of themes
and discussing other areas of the book, how I could tie the article in. I glad that other people found things, and that’s great, but I didn’t see that, but I’m opening up the floor to you so that one at a time, for those of us that feel like your articles do fit in well with themes, do fit in well with other areas. Now’s the time for you to carry your voice, because I feel that what you have to say is important, and perhaps typing it out wasn’t as good a form for you as speaking, so the floor is yours. What does anybody have to say about in terms of your articles? (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013)

With his first comments, Mr. Allen seemed to anticipate what students would say and responded with another defense of his selections. He also explained that some students had not made a strong enough connection to the themes of To Kill a Mockingbird for him to be able to tie the article into his lesson. He then encouraged the students to share their comments and acknowledged that their comments were important. By the time he finished his own explanations, students had only eight minutes remaining in class. Three students took out their written justifications for why they wanted Mr. Allen to reconsider his choices. Although Hannah had brought her notes in written form, she was also the first to try to negotiate with Mr. Allen verbally. Hannah was a mid-range reader who had submitted the informational text about hunting the barnacle buck, which is a male deer with a rare form of antlers. Hannah argued that her text did indeed relate to To Kill a Mockingbird because the Ewells (a poor family in the book) had to hunt year round for food since their father drank and used all of the family’s money on himself. Mr. Allen soothingly repeated “okay” while Hannah made her case. Hannah also added that hunting that type of deer was like racism in a way. Afterward, Mr. Allen explained that he saw the connection but struggled to see how he could connect that to themes in the book. He concluded, “It’s not really talking about hunting back in the day, and it’s not really talking about race. That’s why I wasn’t as inclined to choose it as I was the others” (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013).
At this point, other students came to Hannah’s defense. What follows is the dialogue from this conversation:

Krisy: “I didn’t think it had to be about racism.”

Mr. Allen: “Well, again, we’re trying to tie it in to themes in the book, which is the major theme in To Kill a Mockingbird.”

Jellie: “But they did have guns in To Kill a Mockingbird.”

Mr. Allen: It did have guns, I understand that.

Mary Jane: The “Looking Hot” article wasn’t about African Americans, I just read that whole thing. I was just sitting here. She didn’t mean for that to be about racism.

Mr. Allen: Yeah, but it’s still talking about racism.

Mary Jane: I know but she didn’t mean for it to be racist.

(fieldnotes, November 25, 2013)

Mr. Allen then explained for about one minute about how unintentional racism was still a form of racism. He never went back to Hannah’s points, but transitioned instead to talking about how the “Looking Hot” article that he selected did connect with To Kill a Mockingbird. Students around the room appeared to grow very interested in the conversation and the article, as evidenced by their increased attention to the teacher and other students, their raised hands indicating a desire to participate in the discussion, and their increased levels of excitement and emotion as students discussed the ideas in the article. It became evident that more and more students, like Mary Jane, had pulled up the article on their laptops and were reading it during the negotiation time.
With three minutes left before the bell would ring, Mr. Allen asked if anyone else wanted to “throw out some reasons” for changing his initial text selections (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013). Some students had begun packing up their materials, and Melody (whose article Mr. Allen had selected) said that she liked the four he had chosen. Gabe added that he did too, to which Mr. Allen replied with some emotion, “Good! Good! I’m glad you--I appreciate that. Ah, Gabe, thank you very much!” (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013). Several students were still having loud conversations about the “Looking Hot” article, so Mr. Allen called them back to order. He told everyone that he would let them know tomorrow what his final decisions were. Students reminded him, with apparent satisfaction, that he was supposed to prepare a PowerPoint, to which he conceded, “In a PowerPoint, yes, I know” (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013).

With just one minute left, Mr. Allen asked again if anyone else wanted to give reasons for including their informational text. Smoke, who had submitted an article about Alabama football said, “Jem wants to play football in Alabama” Jem being a character in the novel (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013). Mr. Allen replied, “That’s true. So again, I’ll go back again and look at that again. That may be more like an honorable mention” (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013).

**Improvements over the Pilot Study**

Several aspects of this negotiation were improvements over the pilot study. During the pilot study, students negotiated the selections immediately after the teacher presented her choices. When presenting her initial selections, the teacher had called her choices “winners” and identified the students who had submitted them. Afterward, students’ emotions were fresh and raw, with some feeling triumphant and others feeling rejected that their texts were
not chosen. When students began arguing for their own choices, their comments were largely emotional without any cogent reasoning. The teacher appeared displeased by their comments and shut down the negotiations after a minute or two by ignoring students who continued to speak and moving on to the next activity.

In comparison, the iteration A negotiations had gone more smoothly, possibly influenced by changes and additional structure to the protocol. First of all, students had more time to consider the teachers’ choices because they negotiated the next school day after learning about Mr. Allen’s initial choices. In addition, there was a structure in place for how students would provide their comments to Mr. Allen and students had time to plan their arguments. Furthermore, the teacher showed more patience with students, as evidenced by how he listened while the students commented, nodding his head and encouraging students to continue by saying “okay” very kindly as students spoke. He also openly invited more comments when other students were finished.

**Limitations to Negotiation Process**

**Limited preparation.** Nevertheless, the students in study iteration A still had somewhat limited circumstances for preparation and negotiation with their teacher. For example, students had little opportunity to review the teacher’s choices since he gave only titles with brief descriptions at the end of class on Friday. In order to review his selections carefully, students would have had to do so over the weekend using the Internet at home, if available. Furthermore, giving time over the weekend may not have been the best plan for asking students to prepare their comments since students may have been busy with other activities. In fact, only three students came to class with notes prepared. So instead of reviewing the texts at home, many students were reviewing them during the negotiation time.
These limitations meant that students could not speak knowledgably about texts other than what they themselves had submitted. Furthermore, the students’ time to negotiate was largely taken up by finishing an assignment and then by the teacher restating his reasons for his choices. If given more time for reviewing other texts and negotiating, perhaps more students would have shared their suggestions for changes.

**Traditional classroom roles.** There were some indications that the participants had trouble moving away from their traditional classroom roles toward more shared forms of agency. For example, when Mr. Allen first showed me his list of the four selected texts to give to students, he had the words *Here are the winners* in bold letters across the top. This indicated that Mr. Allen maintained his role as a judge and evaluator of students’ selections. I recommended that he change the wording since I recalled what happened in the pilot study and students were to be consultants rather than contestants. He readily agreed and changed the heading to *Here are my selections* (see Appendix H). However, Mr. Allen did mention to Smoke that he would consider making his recommended text an honorable mention. Indeed, on the final PowerPoint he presented to students, Mr. Allen added a list of recommended texts he called honorable mentions.

Mr. Allen also reminded students that the reason he did not incorporate their recommended texts was because the students had done a poor job of making the case for it, thereby maintaining his role as the teacher whose job was to evaluate the students’ performances. For example, on the list of selected texts, he typed “If you do not see your article written above, it is most likely due to you not explaining clearly enough the relationship between it and the novel” (see Appendix H). For the students whose texts were chosen, he wrote, “People really helped their cases when they went into detail in their
justification sections for why their articles were connected to the novel and why we should read them in class” (see Appendix H). While presenting the PowerPoint, he stated the following as an explanation for why he did not select some of the students’ recommended informational texts:

Again, I was looking for a good explanation and for some of these, I didn’t really get it, and again, they were finding things they were interested in, but they didn’t tie them in. They didn’t think about that. They needed to make better connections with what we read in the novel. And also, some people did a better job of explaining themselves. Some people took advantage of that, and some people did not. I was looking for convincing reasons, and I didn’t get that (fieldnotes, November 26, 2013)

These statements demonstrate that Mr. Allen maintained his traditional role as an evaluator of student performance, which, as Basu (2008) warned, can make claiming new forms of agency problematic for students. There is no evidence that Mr. Allen accepted the students’ recommendations as the work of consultants who could teach him something about what his students needed to be more engaged with the lesson. Instead, his tone when making these comments was one of disappointment that students had not done a better job. Based on his comments, the students’ recommendations were more like a typical assignment where students could fail or succeed based on their willingness to give the teacher what he had required, rather than an opportunity for students to change the status quo and serve as consultants to recommend texts that had greater potential to serve their own needs. One cannot blame Mr. Allen for the selections he made since clearly many of the texts would not fit into his lesson. However, it is unlikely that any amount of reasoning on behalf of students would have helped. Perhaps students had been unable to meet his expectations, not because they were unwilling to complete the request as directed, but because they could not find informational texts about their first-space passions, such as shoes, horses, cheerleading, fishing, or hunting, that could connect with To Kill a Mockingbird in any meaningful way.
Students also tended to maintain their traditional roles as students by viewing their text recommendations as completing just another assignment to be evaluated by the teacher. In fact, most students accepted Mr. Allen’s criticism of their text recommendations as normal and justified. Just minutes after the teacher shared his final choices with the students, I asked students to complete the Student Feedback Questionnaire (see Appendix D). One of the questions was Why do you think the teacher included or did not include the texts you recommended? To this, nearly all students accepted the teacher’s explanation for why their text was or was not selected, as if the matter were uncontestable and the teacher’s evaluation was accurate. See the following responses on the questionnaire for representative examples:

JayGhost: because i didn’t support my reasoning as well as i could have.

Jessica: I didnt explain it well

Melody: Because it pertained to the themes of To Kill A Mockingbird really well and tied in with its themes. (November 16, 2013)

As these comments demonstrate, students accepted Mr. Allen’s choices and evaluations as valid, as if the teacher knew best. They did not think to question that perhaps other informational texts could have worked if Mr. Allen had opened up his requirements more.

**Student disappointment.** In contrast, three students expressed disappointment with the teacher’s decisions, and in that way rejected the teacher’s evaluations as valid. Consider these two responses on the questionnaire:

Jellie: mr.c will let us pick what we wanna read then just read what he wants

Gabe: it was alright I didn't speak I don't use informational texts and im not looking for any. (November 16, 2013)

These students’ responses appeared to be connected to negative emotions in reaction to the teachers’ final selections rather than to the overall experience, since both students expressed
enthusiasm for the texts they recommended to the teacher. Also, Gabe had spoken during class to tell Mr. Allen that he liked his four choices. His comment that “it was alright I didn’t speak” possibly indicated that he had wanted to speak on behalf of his fishing article but had decided against it. During the follow-up interview, Hannah also expressed dissatisfaction with Mr. Allen’s decision. When I asked what changes she would recommend that I make to the process in the future, she responded, “Like, have like one different. You know how he picked all racism? Like I understand that’s a big part of the book, but picking two racism and two that are different about the book” (November 26, 2013). In spite of these students’ apparent criticisms of the teacher’s ultimate selections, they were unable to influence change in Mr. Allen’s final decision.

**Limited benefit for students.** Overall, the negotiation process seemed to have limited benefit for most students. Although the teacher did select informational texts that students had recommended, three of his top choices were from students who appeared to have reached more toward the teacher’s second space goals. For example, consider all four of the informational texts Mr. Allen selected. First of all, LeAnn selected the “Racism Alive and Swell in the NFL” text, but commented on the reading survey that she enjoyed reading “ghetto teen high school book like bluford high and Sharon Draper books.” This indicated that LeAnn may have been more interested in finding a text that would please Mr. Allen rather than herself. Second, the “Unjust Convictions” text, which was submitted by Melody, fit somewhat with her preferred types of reading, which she described as “politics, society, or mainly things that make the world go into an uproar” (survey response, November 13, 2013); however, her preferred readings naturally fit more closely with the teacher’s second space text goals. Third, Krisy had wanted to find an informational text about shoe fashions, but
ultimately had to find something else and found the Jay-Z article about racism. In her follow-up interview, this is how she described her feelings about the article on Jay-Z:

Me: Will knowing you/your classmates helped to select the texts change how you feel about reading them during the lesson?

Krisy: No.

Me: So even the article that you picked yourself, you won’t feel different than when Mr. Allen gives you stuff to read?

Krisy: No.

Me: But you selected the one about Jay-Z, but you wouldn’t feel differently about reading it. Do you normally like the things the teachers assign?

Krisy: Not really.

Me: Would you have felt different if you found one about shoes?

Krisy: Yeah.

Me: So were you really interesting in the one about Jay-Z, or did you just pick it?

Krisy: I just picked it.

Me: To just have something to turn in?

Krisy: Yeah. (interview response, December 2, 2013)

As this exchange demonstrated, the informational text Krisy submitted did not really represent her first space. Instead, it simply related to racism, something that the teacher considered an important theme for students to connect with their selections. Only Jellie’s text “No Doubt Removes ‘Looking Hot’ Music Video over Racism Claims” seemed close to most students’ first space goals, something that was confirmed when many students read and discussed the article in class without it being assigned. So although students influenced the teacher’s choice of informational texts by recommending them, three out of the four texts he
selected reflected his second space goals more closely than many of the students’ first space goals.

**Summary**

Data from observations, artifacts, questionnaires and interviews indicated that the students’ ability to negotiate with their teacher may have been limited in this study by the following factors: little time to read the selected articles, little time to present their arguments to the teacher, and difficulties breaking away from the traditional roles of teacher and student. Furthermore, some of the texts the teachers selected likely served the teacher’s second space goals more than they served the students’ first space goals. Although two students argued boldly for their choices and other students expressed disappointment, the negotiations had minimal impact on the teachers’ final selections of informational texts, other than to prompt the addition of an honorable mentions list.

**Engagement in First Spaces Only—Findings for Secondary Research Question #3**

*How do choice and negotiation influence the reading engagement of students around informational texts?* To answer this research question, I begin with a discussion of how reading engagement related to student interest for students in iteration A. Afterward, I consider how the process of negotiation seemed to have limited influence on students’ reading engagement. Finally, I describe what happened with regard to reading engagement when the selected informational text was used during an ELA lesson.

**Influence of Student Interest on Engagement**

Evidence from my two early observations of Mr. Allen’s class demonstrated that students were more engaged in informational texts when students were reading texts of their own choosing. As presented previously, when students were involved in reading self-
selected informational texts online about a famous individual of their choice, students
demonstrated multiple indicators of classroom engagement and reading engagement.
However, when the teacher led students in the reading of an informational text that he
himself had selected for students (the fabricated “King of England’s response to Thomas
Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence”), none of the indicators for classroom engagement
and reading engagement were evident. (See Appendix B to view observation protocols for
engagement.)

Observations of students as they recommended texts to their teacher also revealed a
clear connection between engagement and student choice. As students searched for
informational texts that met their first space goals for reading, they demonstrated all of
Guthrie’s (2004) indicators for engaged reading. First of all, students were intently looking
at the reading material online with apparent extended focus. Secondly, students
demonstrated an intrinsic motivation for wanting to find these informational texts, as
evidenced by the students’ expressions of enthusiasm as well as the students’ comments on
the recommendation form and questionnaire. Consider the following comments from
students that suggest how they were intrinsically motivated to find these texts for themselves
and even to help others:

Jellie: i looked on Google for informational text about fashion and i
love Gwen Steffani so i started reading it and i enjoyed it.
(questionnaire, November 26, 2013)

Gabe: It is about fishing. It is a great thing and I like to do it. (form
submission, November 20, 2013)

Hannah: this is because it tells you BOUT HUNTING it is my life and i
would do anything to get kids in hunting. (form submission,
November 15, 2013)
JayGhost: because i like basketball so why not read about one of the greats. and then it could motivate others to go after their dreams. (form submission, November 15, 2014)

As a third indicator of engaged reading, students asked for strategies to help them find the informational texts they wanted to read about. During the three class periods of searching for texts, students were constantly asking me or Mr. Allen for help in finding the texts they wanted. For a particularly glaring example, consider Krisy’s continuing search for an informational text about shoes, and her disappointment at not finding what she wanted. Finally, students enjoyed social interactions around the informational texts they selected. During the text selection process, many students showed others in the class what they had found. Several students called me over to show their chosen texts with pride. Two of the most enthusiastic students about their chosen texts were Hannah and Bailey. Hannah showed the other students around her the text she found about the barnacle buck; and Bailey, a particularly quiet student in the class, surprised her classmates with how passionately she talked about wild horses and the efforts to save them referenced in her recommended text.

**Influence of Negotiation on Engagement**

In contrast with the influence of student choice and interest, the process of negotiating with the teacher did not appear to support student engagement, either generally or around the reading of informational texts. During the actual negotiation process, students tended to quit attending to the teacher’s presentation of his initial choices. As Mr. Allen talked about his first selection on the unjust convictions of black men who were released from prison, most students appeared to listen at the start but then lost interest, as evidenced by the growing number of students who put down their heads or started talking. This pattern continued through Mr. Allen’s presentation of the first two texts. However, as Mr. Allen introduced the
two remaining selections (the article about Jay-Z and Barneys, and the article about No Doubt’s controversial music video) the distractions became less about ignoring Mr. Allen and more about attending to the texts. When Mr. Allen first showed students the Jay-Z text, a buzz of talking began around the room. At one point, 18 out of 20 students were looking at the text on their laptops or on the projection screen, and three students had their hands raised. Students started making comments and asking Mr. Allen questions about the text, such as, “I heard one of his outfits was like $3200” and “What’s Gucci?” (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013). Mr. Allen answered many of their questions and then moved on to present the article about No Doubt’s music video. The same type of buzz occurred with this text, with even more energy and enthusiasm. Several students around the room were reading the article and talking about it. At one point, Mr. Allen was no longer in charge of the conversation; instead, Mary Jane took over with her argument that the music video was not meant to be racist. Even when Mr. Allen tried to explain about unintentional racism and redirect students to their turn in the negotiations, many students around the room were still discussing the No Doubt article. At one point, Mr. Allen implored students, “We’re still having this discussion. We’re not done yet” (fieldnotes, November 25, 2013) in an attempt to pull their attention back to him. Evidently, the process of negotiation, in and of itself, did not support classroom engagement or reading engagement; instead, the presentation of certain high-interest texts prompted many students to choose to read the informational texts on their own rather than attend to the negotiations. Ironically, while students were distracted from negotiating for the informational texts they wanted to read, they were actually sending fairly strong messages about which two informational texts could have been most engaging to them if incorporated into a future lesson.
The students’ comments on the questionnaire confirmed the notion that student choice was the key to reading engagement. The student feedback questionnaire asked students whether or not they would feel different about reading texts their class recommended as compared to reading texts their teacher selected for them. Students’ answers to this question mainly depended upon whether or not their recommended texts were chosen by the teacher. For example, Melody, whose article was selected, replied, “When the students pick them, they know the other students will like it too because they know each other well” (questionnaire, November 26, 2013). Bailey, whose article was not selected, replied, “No because i still wont be able to choose what we read” (questionnaire, November 26, 2013). Their responses suggested that students could feel differently about an informational text during a lesson only if the informational text reflected their own choices rather than someone else’s.

**Limited Engagement during the ELA Lesson**

When students did eventually experience the lesson involving one of the student-recommended texts, there was no evidence to suggest that negotiation or knowing that students contributed to the selection of the text did anything to improve overall classroom engagement or engagement around the reading of an informational text. For this lesson, Mr. Allen had printed out copies of the informational text entitled, “Racism Alive and Swell in the NFL” by LeCharles Bentley, which LeAnn had originally submitted. As explained before, LeAnn’s text recommendation may have been an effort to satisfy the teacher’s second space goals rather than her own, since her own preferred readings, as stated on the survey, were for “ghetto teen high school” books (November 13, 2013). In addition, the text was not one of the high-interest selections that distracted students during the negotiations, the articles
about No Doubt and Jay-Z. Mr. Allen gave students this four page article to read and mark with notes for homework. When students received the assignment, there were groans all around, including these exclamations from various students around the room, “Oh my God! Who was so evil? It’s so long! Mine’s was so short” (fieldnotes, December 5, 2013). The teacher then added, “This is your homework, and if you don’t bring it into me tomorrow, you’re going to get a zero for it” (fieldnotes, December 5, 2013).

On the following day, as Mr. Allen began a discussion about the text, students’ attitudes toward it were still cold. By this time, students had recalled that LeAnn submitted the article, to which one student exclaimed in exasperation, “LeAnn!” (fieldnotes, December 6, 2013). Interest increased somewhat as Mr. Allen projected online pictures of the football players referenced in the article. At this point, approximately two-thirds of students were paying attention to the teacher. When Mr. Allen led students back to a review of their homework notes, attention waned, and only about half of the class remained on-task. Eventually, two students began throwing paper balls surreptitiously across the room, and one student turned to me and asked, “What are we doing?” (fieldnotes, December 6, 2013). Over the course of the homework review, students become even more disengaged. Even LeAnn talked for several minutes to the classmate next to her. I include more details about this lesson in the next section on barriers to student agency. However, just this brief description makes clear that the student-recommended informational text used for the lesson had no unusual power to engage the class in the reading of an informational text. Ultimately, what mattered for engaged reading of informational texts was simply whether or not the text met an individual student’s first space goals and interests.
Summary

Data collected from the iteration A study suggested that student choice had a strong influence on the reading engagement of students around informational text, while the process of negotiation did not. Evidence from early observations suggested that students were more engaged with reading informational texts when they were able to focus on a topic of their choice. Students also demonstrated behaviors of engaged reading while they were searching for informational texts to recommend to the teacher. Although negotiating which texts the teacher should choose did not appear to have a positive influence on reading engagement, students became engaged in reading when, as part of the negotiations, they encountered an informational text that they found personally appealing. Finally, when students experienced the ELA lesson that incorporated a student-recommended informational text, they did not appear more engaged in the reading. Collective negotiations for choosing texts did not appear to change the way individual students felt about the informational text in the lesson. So although choice appeared to matter greatly with regard to reading engagement around informational texts, the element of choice was effective only if the individual students chose the reading based on their own first space goals and interests.

Tradition, Demands, and Beliefs—Findings for Secondary Research Question #4

What are some barriers to student agency, and how can they be lessened or eliminated? Evidence gathered from observations, forms, questionnaires, and interviews during study iteration A suggested the presence of three barriers to student agency: the participants’ adherence to traditional classroom roles, the teacher’s need to satisfy other demands of the curriculum, and the teacher’s beliefs about students’ motivations. After
presenting my findings about these barriers to student agency, I share the changes made to iteration B as potential ways to lessen or eliminate these barriers.

**Adherence to Traditional Classroom Roles**

One barrier to student agency was that participants had difficulty breaking out of traditional classroom roles during the study. Some students viewed the activity of finding and recommending texts as a typical assignment completed under the authority of the teacher. For example, Jellie commented on her student feedback questionnaire, “I really didn't wanna do it but i did it like i usually do” (November 26, 2013). And although she expressed satisfaction with the “No Doubt” article she found (“i love Gwen Steffani so i started reading it and i enjoyed it.”— November 26, 2013 ), she still recognized the teacher’s final authority when she added, “mr.c will let us pick what we wanna read then just read what he wants” (November 26, 2013). Similarly, when some students described their methods for searching for a text, they appeared more focused on what the teacher was looking for rather than what they personally wanted to read about. For example, Krisy wrote on her questionnaire, “i was looking for stuff that was related to the book ‘To Kill A MockingBird,’” (November 26, 2013) and Jose wrote that he found his text by, “finding things that are similer to the text of the teacher” (November 26, 2013). Even as students searched for informational texts, they sought confirmation from me or Mr. Allen that what they were finding was acceptable. This indicated that the student participants largely retained their traditional roles of having to meet the requirements as set by the adults in school. One result was that some of the informational texts, although recommended by students, may have represented the teacher’s second space goals more than the students’ first space goals.
Furthermore, students appeared to be uncomfortable accepting roles of authority during the negotiations session, perhaps because they were unwilling to take the social risk of doing so or because traditional student-teacher roles were still in place whereas the teacher sets the expectations and the students must meet them. Both Krisy and Gabe indicated on their questionnaires that they had been unwilling to speak up during the negotiation session. Krisy wrote, “i don’t like speaking in front of other people” (November 26, 2013). On his feedback questionnaire, Gabe wrote that the negotiation session “was alright” but that “I didn’t speak” (November 26, 2013). Yet he clearly preferred his own texts to others, having added to the recommendation form that “all of the other ones are boring and this one isn't” (November 20, 2013). Interestingly, Gabe actually had spoken up during the negotiation session; he announced that he liked the four selections Mr. Allen had made. Perhaps Gabe did not speak up about his own text because he felt more comfortable maintaining traditional classroom roles rather than taking a social risk in front of his peers in support of his own preferred text. In addition, perhaps students needed another option for negotiating with the teacher other than through writing their ideas at home or speaking aloud in class.

Similarly, the teacher also had difficulty breaking out of his traditional teacher role as the evaluator of student performance. Although Mr. Allen was simply to share with students which texts he selected, his presentation to students felt more like evaluation than mere selection. As an illustration, consider again these comments to students:

…some articles didn’t make the cut. Again, I was looking for a good explanation and for some of these, I didn’t really get it, and again, they were finding things they were interested in, but they didn’t tie them in. They didn’t think about that. They needed to make better connections with what we read in the novel…some people did a better job of explaining themselves. Some people took advantage of that, and some people did not. I was looking for convincing reasons, and I didn’t get that. (fieldnotes, November 26, 2013)
Although the teacher did not grade the students’ recommendations, he did assign certain value to students and their submissions, calling some selections *winners* and others *honorable mentions*. And as explained in the findings for research question two, some students readily accepted the teachers’ evaluation of their recommended texts without question.

**Demands of the Curriculum**

A second barrier to student agency was the teacher’s need to satisfy the demands of the curriculum. Time was the most commonly noted curriculum pressure for Mr. Allen. During several of our informal conversations, he commented that he needed stay on track with the planned curriculum. For example, when students needed more time to find texts to recommend, he requested that I wait until the following week, explaining that he needed to return students to their study of *To Kill a Mockingbird* before they lost focus. Once the selections were finalized, Mr. Allen felt more pressure to complete the novel unit, so he delayed the use of a recommended text in a lesson. So although students had searched for informational texts that connected with themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mr. Allen felt that he did not have time to incorporate one into that unit. When I asked him how he planned to incorporate a recommended text, he asked if he really needed to do so since he was running out of time in the semester and needed to begin their study of *Romeo and Juliet*. I suggested that he find a way to use one of the texts somehow since he had promised students he would. Ultimately, he added the text to a lesson on argumentative texts.

Although Mr. Allen did find a way to incorporate one of the students’ recommended texts, doing so appeared difficult because of his desire to move on to the unit on *Romeo and Juliet*, his frustration at trying to keep students on task, and because he needed to keep pace
with his teacher curriculum teammates in his professional learning community. On the day
that Mr. Allen began the lesson that incorporated one of the student-recommended texts, he
expressed the need to just “get through” the lesson:

   We’re going to be getting away from reading for a little while…in terms of
   reading books. Next week we’re going to start Romeo and Juliet. So we need
to be prepared for that. But in the meantime, before we get there, we’ve got to
get through this. (fieldnotes, December 5, 2013)

When Mr. Allen passed out an informational text for students to read during the lesson, the
students and I were surprised to discover that it was not one of the students’ recommended
texts. Instead it was an article entitled, “The Case for Social Media in Schools” by Sarah
Kessler from mashable.com. Krisy turned to ask me if we were going to read “our article”
December 5, 2013). Seeing our confusion, Mr. Allen commented that they would get to that
one later.

   During most of the remaining class time, Mr. Allen read the social media article aloud
to students and paused to have them mark the text according to his directions. Student
engagement was extremely low as Mr. Allen read aloud and led discussion. Near the end of
the class period, many students were talking to each other rather than paying attention to the
lesson. Mr. Allen’s frustration with students’ talking grew so much so that he declared he
was going to keep students in class one minute past the bell. This made many students
angry, and while some students complained, others yelled at them to be quiet. It was at this
time that Mr. Allen passed out the students’ recommended text for homework saying, in an
antagonistic tone, especially considering the emotional state of both the teacher and students:
“I told you that I would find a way to use them. Well I’ve found a way to use them”
(fieldnotes, December 5, 2013). As mentioned earlier, the teacher then declared, “This is
your homework, and if you don’t bring it into me tomorrow, you’re going to get a zero for it”
(fieldnotes, December 5, 2013). As a final reassertion of his authority, he finished the class with the following:

We don’t want to be sitting here tomorrow at 2:56 and 2:57 on Friday, but we will if people continue to talk. If there’s still--some doing whatever they want to do and they’re taking away from my time. So people need to understand that from 1:25 until 2:55 is my time. We’re not here to do whatever we want to do. (fieldnotes, December 5, 2013)

When I later asked Mr. Allen why he had chosen to use the social media article rather than the student-recommended text for the main part of the lesson, he explained that he was using an article agreed upon with other teachers in his PLC teacher group. He explained that that was important to do because some of the students in his class attended a support class with other ninth-grade English students who previewed the readings together, so the readings needed to be the same in all classes. He added though, “When I teach the argumentative unit again, I will certainly try to work in the articles the students found last semester. Hindsight's always 20-20!” (email communication, February 3, 2014).

**Beliefs about Students’ Motivations**

Another barrier to student agency may have been the teacher’s beliefs about students’ levels of motivation. In the final teacher interview, when I asked Mr. Allen how I could improve the procedures for negotiation with students, he replied:

It would probably help if they were a higher level more motivated class. I think their main thing was just submitting articles, and I think they didn’t care so much after that. They just submitted stuff to me, and they were on their laptops, so that made them more involved as well. Working with perhaps more motivated students would help that negotiation process. (December 19, 2013)

Based on his response, Mr. Allen may have believed that the students did not really care about the texts they recommended. And instead of considering how some of the procedures may have contributed to students’ inability to negotiate for the texts they wanted, he
attributed their ineffectiveness to a lack of motivation. This also indicated that he believed their level of motivation was a fixed state, rather than something his own actions could influence. By believing that the students were not greatly invested in the texts beyond the initial recommendation, Mr. Allen may have felt that it was less important to incorporate their selections, especially since doing so took time away from the planned curriculum.

In spite of the apparent barriers to student agency in study iteration A, the follow-up interviews with six students indicated that they did experience an unfamiliar new sense of agency during the study. When I asked Melody to describe the study, she explained,

I feel like it made the kids more adult in the class than just having to listen to Mr. Allen. It made them part of it. It made them teachers, because they were teaching him what they liked and what they think he should teach in class. (interview, November 26, 2013)

Melody also maintained faith in Mr. Allen’s willingness to share agency with his students. When asked if she thought most teachers would be interested in having students help with their lessons, she replied:

I feel like Mr. Allen would like it, and I feel like certain other teachers (I don’t really know any) kind of wouldn’t because they feel like it’s their class and they control it themselves; but Mr. Allen is like, it is my class, but these kids have a say in it too. (November 26, 2013)

JayGhost also felt that Mr. Allen had provided them with more control as students. When asked during the interview about his teacher’s role in the study, he commented that “Mr. Allen, he’s just open for anything, I guess.” When asked if he felt like his role as a student changed through the process, he explained:

Yes, I think we were treated more as an equal. Cause like, teachers have their meetings and stuff for planning, and stuff, and during this I felt like it was a time for us, like the teacher and the students to plan on something, interacting. (November 26, 2013)
When I asked the same question of Xochitl during the interview, she also acknowledged having a greater sense of agency:

Yeah, cause usually teachers don’t ask for students’ opinions about what they read and how to make it more interesting. Like they didn’t really treat us like students; they treated us like adults trying to make our decisions about what we want to read. (November 26, 2013)

When asked to describe the study, Hannah characterized what happened as follows:

Like, I would describe it as letting students choose what we want to read, like we get the freedom of actually liking school because, it’s like, when we’re pushed to do something we don’t like, we don’t want to do it, and so like this study is letting us have just a little bit of freedom and to read what we like. (November 26, 2013)

Even Gabe, who declared that he “did not like to read at all” on his reading survey (November 13, 2013), answered that his role did change during the study because “my opinion was, like, I was told to put in my opinion, like what I like to read” (interview, December 2, 2013).

Of all six students interviewed, only Krisy answered that she did not feel her role as a student changed during the study because she was unable to find an informational text about fashion trends in shoes. Nevertheless, she explained that she would like the opportunity to help her teacher plan lessons in the future, and she did believe that the process could help high school students with reading because “if they get to read what they’re interested in, it would help them learn” (December 2, 2013). So in spite of these barriers, most students in study iteration A expressed an appreciation for having found at least some additional space for student agency, what Hannah called in her interview, “just a little bit of freedom” (November 26, 2013).
Lessening Barriers to Student Agency

As demonstrated, the data collected during study iteration A suggested that there were three barriers to student agency: difficulty breaking out of traditional student-teacher roles, demands of the curriculum including pressures of time, and the teacher’s beliefs about students’ motivations. A second part of this research question asked how these barriers can be eliminated. In an effort to lessen or eliminate these barriers to student agency for study iteration B, I made the following adjustments to the classroom procedures based on the findings and Mr. Allen’s and students’ recommendations, organized here in the order they would be enacted:

Table 5: Changes to Lessen or Eliminate Barriers to Student Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes:</th>
<th>Purposes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress often to the participants that students are taking on a new role as “consultants to the teacher” and explain that as such students will provide “expert” advice to their teacher.</td>
<td>To lessen the barrier of traditional roles by reminding the teacher and students that they should try to break away from their traditional roles, at least temporarily. To lessen the barrier of teacher’s beliefs about students’ motivations, at least in a small way, by reminding the teacher that the students are experts in what informational texts appeal to them, rather than just students completing a task they do not care about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop with the teacher a definite plan for using the text before students make their recommendations—one that supports the teacher’s curriculum goals and that also requires less direct connection to a particular theme, book, or unit.</td>
<td>To lessen or eliminate the barrier of curriculum time pressures by helping the teacher find a way to incorporate the text that would be supportive of the planned curriculum rather than disruptive. To lessen or eliminate the barrier of curriculum time pressures by giving the lesson timelessness, so that it can fit easily into the curriculum anytime during the semester. To lessen the barrier of curriculum restrictions on students’ text searches by opening up the second space requirements to include more topics and themes the students prefer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streamline the process for</td>
<td>To lessen the barrier of curriculum time pressures by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
recommending texts to the teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Expected Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask the teacher to plan a set amount of time for each step of the study, and stress the importance of protecting that time as planned.</td>
<td>To lessen the barrier of curriculum time pressures and students’ difficulties breaking out of traditional classroom roles, by protecting the students’ time to recommend and negotiate the informational texts that they find meaningful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask the teacher to provide students with time in class to review the informational texts other students recommend.</td>
<td>To lessen the barrier of curriculum time pressures and students’ difficulties breaking out of traditional classroom roles by ensuring so that students are more informed going into negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have students use electronic media (email and Googleforms) for communicating their negotiations with the teacher.</td>
<td>To lessen the barrier of teacher’s and students’ difficulties with breaking out of traditional classroom roles by providing a structured way of negotiating that uses a less traditional method for communicating with the teacher that does not require verbal negotiations in the classroom and reduces social risks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through these changes, I hoped to lessen or eliminate the barriers to student agency that appeared during iteration A when conducting study iteration B.

In the next chapter, I present my findings from iteration B. As with the findings for iteration A, I begin with a description of the study context, including a description of the teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and class characteristics. Afterward, I present the findings from iteration B by answering each of the secondary research questions. Then at the end of chapter 5, I use the findings from both iterations to answer the primary research question about what set of circumstances would allow students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum.
CHAPTER V
CONSULTANTS WITH OUR TEACHER—FINDINGS FOR ITERATION B

“I felt like we weren’t students for those few days we did the project, but like we were consultants with our teacher. I felt like we had some power.”
(Marie, questionnaire response, December 19, 2013)

Just as with iteration A, it is important to consider the characteristics of the teacher, the students, and how they interact, to understand the context of study iteration B.

Dealing with Individuals--Teacher Characteristics

“I think they are capable of a lot of things--it just takes time to get each one to see what they’re capable of. Ahm--A lot of time, and I think a lot of individual attention.”
(Ms. Lawrence, interview, December 13, 2013)

At the time of the study, Ms. Lawrence was an English language arts teacher in her fifties beginning her fourth year of teaching. She entered teaching after 10 years of practicing law and then caring for her four children. “In college, I couldn’t decide whether I wanted to go to law school or be a teacher. And I decided to go to law school because I thought that was the, ah, more interesting and certainly more professional job.” Ultimately, Ms. Lawrence left her law career to become a teacher and “serve my community” and “help out kids that I thought needed some help” (interview response, December 13, 2013).

When asked to describe her greatest challenges and successes in teaching, Ms. Lawrence described her challenges as understanding the students’ backgrounds and meeting their individual needs. “They each seem to have their own unique challenges before they ever walk into the room, and then that’s, I think, been the biggest challenge, is how to meet
each kid’s needs” and “getting them up to where you think they can be critical thinkers” (interview response, December 13, 2013). Ms. Lawrence was more hesitant to describe her greatest successes:

I’m not sure! I’m not even sure what the successes are. I did have a student that I just saw at Food Lion back from college—I’ve had two kids from college now call me and say thank you for helping us learn how to write better because it’s come into play at college. So that was rewarding to hear, but—so, I—you know, it’s hard to know the successes you have. (interview response, December 13, 2013)

As for challenges and successes with the specific class being studied, she explained that keeping them focused was the greatest challenge. “They’re very energetic—sweet, energetic, but a real range of needs” (interview response, December 13, 2013). She added, “I don’t think I’ve gotten them where they need to be on writing. I’m surprised we’re this far in the semester and they don’t write—they haven’t taken what I’ve said to heart and they don’t apply it” (interview response, December 13, 2013). Her greatest successes with the class were that the students “found that there’s value in reading. They were surprised that they did like Of Mice and Men. They were surprised that they related to Huck Finn. You know that they do say ‘I don’t like to read, but this was a good book.’ Okay, alright! I’ll take that!” (interview response, December 13, 2013).

When asked about her perception of who adolescents are and what they are capable of doing, Ms. Lawrence described them as a “mixed bag of both an adult and a child.” She explained:

They have very adult thoughts, and they have very childish thoughts all wrapped into one. Ahm--and I think they are capable of a lot of things--it just takes time to get each one to see what they’re capable of. Ahm--A lot of time, and I think a lot of individual attention. To really get them to know me, get them bonded, get them excited, get them feeling confident, it seems to take, whether it’s a smart kid, or a really low kid--they all seem to be really needy. (interview response, December 13, 2013)
In order to plan lessons for the class, Ms. Lawrence explained that she looked at the Common Core standards about what to teach, but that she also took some tips from the teachers around her. She added laughingly, “I just think about it a lot! I think about how I best convey this information and get it into that receptacle. And every time I do it, I think that went well—and that could have been done better—and that was today!” (interview response, December 13, 2013). Ms. Lawrence explained that her most recent lesson on writing a research paper had not gone as planned. She had given students a chart of the expectations that told students what they were going to learn and do for each day of the project, and “I found that that did not work! Because Monday took longer, and Tuesday took longer—It just took them longer to do what I was hoping they could get accomplished” (interview response, December 13, 2013).

When planning what texts her students will read for a lesson, Ms. Lawrence looked first at what the Common Core standards and the state department for public instruction recommended. She then considered what her students could best relate to. She had chosen *Of Mice and Men* because it was relatively easy to read but also contained some “deep thoughts” (interview response, December 13, 2013). She taught *Huck Finn* because she felt that her students could relate to it. She decided to forego teaching *The Crucible* as she sometimes did because it “would go beyond what they would enjoy or could understand in the right amount of time period that I had to give it” (interview response, December 13, 2013). She also explained that she “let go of a lot of reading because we have to focus more on—I’ve let go of a lot of fiction because you have to focus more on informational text” (interview response, December 13, 2013). Ms. Lawrence’s comment reflects the recent shift
toward incorporating more informational texts as required by the newly adopted Common Core State Standards for ELA.

Similar to Mr. Allen, Ms. Lawrence also expressed discomfort with the idea of students contributing to lesson planning and having more independence. When asked what role students generally play in planning lessons or teaching in her classroom, Ms. Lawrence explained that she considered what students were capable of and who they are to inform her planning, but added “I certainly don’t—to be honest with you—ask them what they want to do” (interview response, December 13, 2013). As for students teaching in her classroom, she did like to take advantage of the “learn one, do one, teach one” concept. For example, when she showed students how to use Google Docs, she asked students who understood it to explain it to others, which “helps both of them, the teacher and the learner if they hear it from another student” (interview response, December 13, 2013). However, she was less comfortable with students having independence. When asked how much independence students have in her class, she answered, “Not a lot.” She further explained:

I tried first nine weeks to do a lot of pairs. I even had the chairs, the room set up in pairs, because I think it’s more interesting and more creative when the room is set up differently. And the behavior just was dramatically different, and I couldn’t control them as well. So I went back to these very boring rows. And I will still do some pairs, but it’s--it’s challenging. (interview response, December 13, 2013)

In spite of her discomfort, Ms. Lawrence expressed hope for the study and giving students more agency in the selection of texts for a future lesson. “I think it’s a great idea. I’m not quite sure how it’s going to turn out. But I know that if they pick it, they’re more likely to have that agency. I understand that psychology. So I’m excited to see how it works out” (interview response, December 13, 2013).
When asked about the types of informational texts students typically read for class, Ms. Lawrence shared that the class typically read historical documents and speeches, such as Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling, and the Declaration of Independence. She had selected those texts because they were by American writers (a focus in 11th grade English, as required by the state) and fell within the Common Core guidelines. She also chose those texts because they are excellent examples of writing and persuasion. Like in Mr. Allen’s class, for their research paper students had read informational texts while researching a topic of their choice. As for the challenges of teaching informational texts, she explained:

In this particular class, like my others, they don’t understand what they’re reading. They just don’t understand it. So, it’s comprehension that’s the biggest challenge. And the motivation to try harder—that’s another big challenge. Also, I think there’s, in fiction, there’s a more gentle approach to here’s a story that I’m going to tell you. They’re used to being told a story. But informational text doesn’t convey the same kind of warmth sometimes that a fictional piece would give them. (interview response, December 13, 2013)

When asked what informational texts she thought her students read outside of school, she replied:

I’m trying not to have a smart alec answer. I’m thinking the McDonald’s menu. You know, musical lyrics, which is still not really informational text, but they do seem to be fond of their own interactions with their friends. Their texts--they read that. And, I think very few of them read other things outside of school. (interview response, December 13, 2013)

As for the study, Ms. Lawrence predicted that her students’ skills for choosing informational texts would be enhanced by their knowledge of the outside world, but that they would have a hard time distinguishing between what was valuable and credible and what was not. Another challenge for students would be to survey a text quickly and move on to
another without getting bogged down. She also predicted that some students would take the task seriously while others would “sit back and wait for somebody else to do the work” (interview response, December 13, 2013). However, she still held out hope that they would “find texts out there that are interesting, that they might want to read” which will “show them that if something interests them, they could go read more about it someplace else” (interview response, December 13, 2013). For her own teaching, she hoped that the study would provide “a bunch of helpers finding good texts!” (interview response, December 13, 2013).

A Narrower, More Positive Range of Reading Attitudes—Student Characteristics

The iteration B class was a general level (same level as Mr. Allen’s class) eleventh-grade ELA class containing 25 students. One student chose not to participate in the study, three more were absent over key dates in the study, and four never returned their parent permission forms. Therefore, the data comes from 17 students in the class, nine females and eight males. Nine students identified as White, seven as African-American, one as White-Hispanic, and one as mixed race.

Results of the survey adapted from the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980) indicated a narrower range of diversity with regard to students’ attitudes toward reading when compared to results from iteration A students. As explained in chapter four, the survey allowed for scores that range from 25 (most negative) to 125 (most positive). The results in this class ranged from 53 to 104, as compared to 33 to 116 in iteration A. However, curves in the data still suggested that there were three different types of readers in the classroom, although the low-range and mid-range reading attitudes were not as low as in iteration A, and the high-range reading attitudes were not quite as high:
• students with *low-range* reading attitudes (53-58)
• students with *mid-range* reading attitudes (66-86)
• students with *high-range* reading attitudes (93-104)

Furthermore, the average reading attitude in iteration B was 78.5, whereas the average reading attitude in iteration A was only 64.6. So, overall, the eleventh grade class of older students had more positive attitudes toward reading than the ninth grade class of younger students, which conflicts with findings from other research comparing younger and older adolescent readers. The implications and possible reasons for this difference are addressed in chapter six.

Students with low-range reading attitudes included one male student and one female student. The following is a table containing information about each of these students along with their comments about reading from the survey. Note that, in each table, students selected for interviews at the end of the study iteration are marked with an asterisk.

**Table 6. Low-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses (December 16, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Survey Score</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Describe how you feel about reading in general. Compare that to how you feel about reading for school.</th>
<th>When or if you choose to read something, what kinds of things do you like to read?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buck* 53</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>“I don't like to read, but I will read if I have to. Like for school that is not a problem.”</td>
<td>“I like to read about action or hunting stories, or people having to survive on there own in the woods.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna* 58</td>
<td>Mixed-race female</td>
<td>“I hate reading and school I don't like it either.”</td>
<td>“a book that talk about people life.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students selected for interviews

The comments from these students with low-range reading attitudes (at least when compared to other students in the class) indicated that reading does not appeal to them, perhaps more so for Brianna than Buck based on her strongly worded comment that she hates reading.
Students with mid-range reading attitudes included five male students and six female students. The following is a table containing information about each of these students along with their comments about reading from the survey.

Table 7. Mid-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses (December 16, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student, Survey Score</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Describe how you feel about reading in general. Compare that to how you feel about reading for school.</th>
<th>When or if you choose to read something, what kinds of things do you like to read?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>Its not that I don't like to read its just that I don't have the time to read or when I read at school its boring unless the book we read is interesting.</td>
<td>I like to read about sports or war related books or articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curly Sue</td>
<td>African-American female</td>
<td>I do not have a problem with reading. I just do not like to read on a daily basis unless I have to. Reading for school is sometimes fun and interesting.</td>
<td>I like reading stories about horror, or suspense. I would prefer to read about comedy too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>In general I don't read a lot at all but in school I read everyday.</td>
<td>I like to read fiction stories mostly about adventures and mysteries but I also like non-fiction for example war stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimkay*</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>I like to read things that I want to read. I do not like reading most things in school because it is not interesting to me.</td>
<td>I love to read about how some can or has survived in the woods or world or any place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>I like to read because I think many things are very interesting. Things that have to do with mythical creatures are the kinds of things that I am most interested in. I don't think reading is boring, but if im not interested in reading something then I hate having to sit through it. Reading in school isn't that boring to me, I just wish we could read things that are more interesting and fun.</td>
<td>I like to read things that have to do with fantasy or mythical creatures, and sometimes just normal books for teenagers. I mostly like reading romantic things also, but mainly stuff that goes along with a teenagers life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La'shay</td>
<td>African-American female</td>
<td>I read when have, like for a teacher or something .</td>
<td>love stories , action, adventurist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rese</td>
<td>African-American male</td>
<td>In general I like to read, but I don't. I hate reading for school because their choice of books tend to be boring</td>
<td>I like to read action books or books that involve history, from the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>it fun some times</td>
<td>sports war books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>I like to read, but not all the time. Most of the time I only read when it's</td>
<td>I like to read dramas, magazines, and non-fiction books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Allinson* 83  female  African-American female  I don't take the time to read outside of school because there is no time for that. When I have to read for school I read the book and some of the books that I have to read I enjoy so I don't mind reading for school some of the books inform you.  my favorite thing I like to read is magazines that's something I could read all day its mostly non-fiction and it informs me on a lot of things and entertain me at the same time.

Carson* 86  female  African-American female  I love reading but when I read a novel I would like to read it on my time so that I can have as long as I want to read and get to understand the story. School reading its a time limit and you don't always get a full understanding with a set timing on reading a book.  I like reading like slave story's or something to do with people and bad things in there life.

*Students selected for interviews

As in iteration A, the comments from students with mid-range reading attitudes indicated that they had mixed feelings about reading depending upon conditions such as time and interest. For example, Rese said that he liked to read but that he “[hated] reading for school because their choice of books tend to be boring” (December 16, 2013). Carson said that she preferred to read “on my time so that I can have as long as I want to read and get to understand the story” (December 16, 2013). Their comments about preferred types of reading demonstrated a broad range of reading interests. The male participants reported interests in books and articles about sports, war, mystery, and survival. The female participants reported interests in magazines and books about fantasy, adventure, romance, and real-life experiences.

Students with high-range reading attitudes included four students, including two males and two females. The following is a table containing information about each of these students along with their comments about reading from the survey.

**Table 8. High-range Reader Demographics and Survey Responses (December 16, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student, Survey Score</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Describe how you feel about reading in general. Compare that to how you feel about reading for school.</th>
<th>When or if you choose to read something, what kinds of things do you like to read?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rocky*</td>
<td>African-</td>
<td>I like to read but only when its</td>
<td>I like to read books about</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American male

something im interested in it or if its something i can relate to,
sports, adventures, action and suspense.

Tibi
Hispanic female

I like reading books for fun. When I have to read books for school I feel like I can not sit down and actually enjoy the book.

I love reading stories about someone's experiences, adventure, romance, and books who are later turned into movies. I love reading book series. I love Nicholas Sparks.

Darren
White male

When I'm reading in general just to read, I can just get pulled into the story, mood, and general idea of the story easier because there's no pressure. When I'm reading for an assignment, there is a lot of pressure to comprehend and understand it so it's a little bit more difficult.

Autobiography novels are my favorite type of books.

Michelle
White female

I love reading books that interest me, but reading in school is not that entertaining for me.

young adult novels, romance, fantasy, and mystery.

*Students selected for interviews

Similar to the mid-range readers, the comments from students with high-range reading attitudes demonstrated mixed feelings about reading that depended upon the conditions. For example, Rocky explained, “I like to read but only when its something im interested in it or if its something i can relate to” (December 16, 2013). Tibi explained that she liked reading for fun, but when reading for school, “I feel like I can not sit down and actually enjoy the book” (December 16, 2013). Unlike the high-range readers in iteration A, the high-range readers in iteration B did not seem to connect any more with reading required for school than did the mid-range readers. Even Michelle, the student in iteration B with the highest reading attitude rating, commented that “reading in school is not that entertaining for me” (December 16, 2013). Overall, the iteration B readers had generally positive views of reading that depended upon the conditions of time and personal interest.
Engagement, Compliance, and Contention—Class Characteristics

During my visits to the classroom prior to the implementation of the protocol, the eleventh grade students from iteration B, unlike those in iteration A, remained calm and compliant whether or not they were engaged in an assignment or task. As with the iteration A class, the students demonstrated the strongest indicators of engagement primarily when students used their laptops to work online and when the topic of discussion or the reading material personally interested them.

When I arrived for my first visit to observe the class, students were sitting quietly in rows with laptop computers on their desks. When compared to the iteration A classroom, the iteration B classroom contained more displays of rules, guidelines, and procedures including the following:

- “Class Rules” on yellow bulletin board: Head up! Eyes open! Purses and hoods off! No cell phones. Follow dress code.
- “Class Procedures” next to door: Turn in everything to green box; If late, sign in late log book, leave pass there; Turn in homework on time; Raise hand to ask to speak.
- Several long blue poster papers on a tack strip along a wall: body paragraph outlines, lists of vocabulary words
- On the white board in blue marker: Warm-up—get laptop; Quiz Friday; Book Talk due 14th, Sentences due Thursday; DUE-Analyzing Literary Elements Answers;

Students were completing a vocabulary task, working virtually with assigned partners through a shared Google doc. Each person on the team had to complete the task for four vocabulary words, for a total of eight words completed as a team. For each word, students
were to “be creative” and complete the following: the definition, an image, how the word is used in the news, and a complete sentence.

Throughout the task, students appeared to be engaged as evidenced by over 80% of the students being consistently on task, students self-regulating their behavior, and students expressing occasional excitement, usually over a comment or image their partners were posting on the shared Google doc. Most of the quiet talking involved getting help from a neighbor to complete the task or in sharing something they had found online. A few students were having trouble with their Google doc, but Ms. Lawrence reminded them to use the Google Chrome browser for better results, which appeared to solve their problems. While they worked, Ms. Lawrence watched their progress from her own computer screen; she was able to review their work by clicking on their shared documents. Ms. Lawrence commented on what she saw, such as “Your page is looking good, but you aren’t finished” and “I like your picture for that word” (fieldnotes, December 4, 2013). Overall, students remained engaged, as evidenced by their intent focus upon their laptop screens and their attempts to work past problems with the technology to find what they needed and complete the task. Students seemed to particularly enjoy finding images to represent each vocabulary word, and much of the discussion around the room centered on those findings.

As in iteration A, during a second observation, students demonstrated much less evidence of classroom engagement as Ms. Lawrence led them through a close reading of the Declaration of Independence. When I arrived, students were in seats with partners facing each other. Students had highlighters and copies of the Declaration of Independence. Ms. Lawrence gave directions for marking the document, asked students questions about what they were marking, and then led a discussion of each section. At one point she asked, “What
tone is Jefferson trying to give you?” (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013). Although a few students attempted possible answers, others appeared frustrated and confused as the teacher explained. At first, approximately 70% of the class appeared to be keeping up with the document and answering questions, but eventually the percentage dwindled. Although students held the highlighters in their hands, several kept their eyes focused away from the document. Eventually, several students became talkative, not about the task at hand. Ms. Lawrence told them, “Look, you guys have been great, but the students in first period struggled with this. I can put you back in rows in a heartbeat” (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013). At this threat, students became quiet again. Still, their attention dwindled. One student’s eyes were closed and another had his head propped in his hand. Three students put their heads completely down on the desks. When the teacher announced, “Get your highlighter, I want you to highlight the next five that you see” (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013), only about half of the class started to use their highlighters.

The process continued, the teacher trying to increase enthusiasm for the document by adding more inflection to her voice and calling students’ attention to the significant ideas in the Declaration. For example, she emphasized the “first mind-blowing idea that all men are created equal!” and then the next “mind-blowing idea that governments only exist to make us happy!” (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013). In spite of her efforts, students displayed more and more signs of distraction and boredom. Eventually, she called on a student whose head was down. When the student explained that he was tired, Ms. Lawrence replied with a sigh, “I know, I know. I am too” (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013).

At this point in the lesson, Ms. Lawrence stopped and spoke to the entire class:

I’ve had a come to Jesus meeting with first period. I need you to make an effort here. Have you seen some of the idiots on TV? Do you want to be one
of them? Of course you don’t. This is difficult. This is probably the hardest thing we will read this year. I need all of you to work—even Carson. (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013)

The class was now alert, waiting to see Carson’s reaction. Carson grumbled, “I want out of this class.” Ms. Lawrence walked away and responded, “I know you want out of this class.” Ms. Lawrence then moved on with the lesson by passing out sticky notes to everyone for students to write down a sentence that they believed objectively summarized the point of the Declaration. Gabrielle, possibly reacting to the recent incident, said to no one in particular, “Write she’s a big old bitch.” Several minutes later, Carson was still feeling the sting of the encounter and had not been able to refocus on the lesson. She said, “I hate when teachers do that. They make you cry” (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013).

After reviewing several of the students’ sentences, Ms. Lawrence invited Rese to read his sentence aloud dramatically. Rese was one of the more popular and confident students in the class. When he performed his sentence dramatically, as requested, the rest of the class turned their heads to him and paid attention. Next Ms. Lawrence discussed how government should not be abolished for little things, in reference to the Declaration of Independence’s statement that government should not be altered for “light and transient causes.” She used examples such as speed limits and the new healthcare policy. During this part of her commentary, students appeared more interested, and they turned their heads toward her as she spoke. Then Ms. Lawrence posed a question for students to discuss with their partners, “So when do you abolish your government?” (fieldnotes, December 10, 2013). She prompted students to look back at the Declaration to find the answers. Only a few students began talking or writing as directed. When Ms. Lawrence opened up the discussion to the whole class, she asked Gabrielle to answer the question aloud for the class. When Gabrielle did not immediately answer, Ms. Lawrence demanded, “Answer the question” (fieldnotes,
December 10, 2013). Gabrielle responded angrily by crossing her arms and turning away from the front of the room in a pose that clearly indicated she would not answer. The bell rang soon afterward for students to go to lunch.

As evidenced from the second observation, students struggled to maintain their engagement around the Declaration of Independence. Their behaviors tended to reflect Guthrie, Soloman, and Rinehart’s (1997) characterization of unengaged reading. According to these characteristics, students were reading for extrinsic purposes only, as they complied with Ms. Lawrence’s requests at least some of the time. Furthermore, students appeared to be doing only surface level reading, sometimes not even looking at the text and certainly without employing strategies for understanding, even though Ms. Lawrence attempted to give them strategies for understanding through the partner work, highlighting, and verbal explanations. Students rarely seemed interested in the text at all, although they did seem to be interested when Ms. Lawrence connected the ideas in the text with situations students encountered in their own lives, such as speeding limits and the new health care law.

Like with iteration A, these initial observations suggested that iteration B students demonstrated engaged behaviors primarily when the task involved elements of choice and personally relevant connections, such as when students chose online images to represent vocabulary words or when the teacher discussed situations students had experienced. Unlike the iteration A class, however, the iteration B class did not appear to be more engaged simply because they were asked to write something down or mark their papers. It is important to note that for both classes, engagement was highest when students were using their laptops. It was difficult to discern whether the enhanced engagement was due more to the use of the technology or to the opportunities to find elements of students’ own choosing. It was also
difficult to know how much students’ engagement related to the difficulty level of the reading; perhaps students lost interest in the Declaration of Independence because they found it difficult to understand and not because it did not interest them. Finally, as in the iteration A class, engagement in class assignments for the iteration B class was occasionally interrupted by conflict between the teacher and students.

What follows next are the adjustments to classroom protocols for iteration B and specific findings from study iteration B as related to each secondary research question. Afterward, I share overall findings for the primary research question based on data from both study iterations.

**Adjustments to Classroom Protocols for Study Iteration B**

Before examining answers to the research questions, it is important to clearly define the adjustments to classroom protocols for iteration B. As indicated at the end of chapter four, the classroom protocols were adjusted to lessen or eliminate barriers to student agency as noted during iteration A. Although the basic steps remained in place, the following protocol (see also Appendix I) was developed for iteration B based on my observations and recommendations from participants in iteration A:

**Step 1:** Meet with the teacher to

(a) discuss and refine the classroom procedures,
(b) select a future lesson or unit for which students will select informational texts, and
(c) set the plan for introducing the task to students.

*Adjustments:*

- *Stress to the teacher that students will be taking on new roles as consultants providing expert advice about what types of texts best engage them in reading.*
- *Guide the teacher to develop a definite plan for using the text in a future lesson, one that supports the teacher’s curriculum goals and*
that also requires less direct connection to a particular theme, book, or unit.

- Ask the teacher to plan a set amount of time for each step in the study and to protect that time as planned.

Step 2: In collaboration with the teacher, introduce the task to the students and have them find and recommend informational texts. The basic elements were to

(a) explain to students that they will serve as consultants to the teacher by selecting informational texts that will be studied in an upcoming lesson,

(b) explain Third Space Theory generally and share with students the parameters of the “second space” within which the teacher works, including the goals and themes of the upcoming lesson, information about the CCSS for ELA, and grade level requirements for text complexity and Lexile levels,

(c) invite students to consider their own “first space” and how they may represent that space in their text selections,

(d) instruct students in helpful online search processes and useful websites, and

(e) establish a period of time for students to find and select texts (two or three days for about 30-45 minutes each day.

Adjustments:
- Stress to the students that they are taking on new roles as consultants to the teacher by providing expert advice about what types of informational texts would best represent their first space goals.
- Streamline the process for recommending texts by removing the Lexile analyzer step. Instead explain what Lexile levels are required in the grade level and show students examples of texts on that level.

Step 3: Provide an opportunity for the students and teacher to negotiate which text(s) will ultimately be included in the lesson, which consisted of four steps,

(a) explain to students that the teacher’s initial selections are not final but just the first step toward negotiation,

(b) have the teacher present her selections and reasoning in a document students can review,

(c) give students at least one day to process the teacher’s choices and plan their responses for negotiation,

(d) share the plan with students for how the negotiation will work.

Adjustments:
- Ask the teacher to provide students with time in class to review the informational texts initially selected by the teacher before providing their feedback.
• *Have students use electronic media (email and Google forms) for communicating their negotiations with the teacher.*

These adjustments to the iteration B protocols were intended to lessen or eliminate the three barriers to student agency noted during iteration A: participants’ difficulty breaking out of traditional student-teacher roles, demands of the curriculum including pressures of time, and teacher’s beliefs about students’ motivations. Although these adjustments were planned with hopes of improving the processes and outcomes for text selection, negotiation, and engagement, it is difficult to discern whether the adjustments to the protocols or the differences between participants and contexts led to the different outcomes for iteration B.

**More Confidence, Less Confusion—Findings for Secondary Research Question #1**

*How do high school students respond to their teacher’s request to find and recommend informational texts for use in a future lesson?* To answer this question, I first describe how the task was introduced to iteration B students. Afterward, I describe what happened when students searched for informational texts. Finally, I share and discuss the informational texts students recommended. As I share the descriptions and findings for iteration B, I explain how they compare to those in iteration A.

**Introduction to the Task**

Just as I had with iteration A students, I began my introduction to the task by drawing a Venn diagram on the board to explain the concept of Third Space Theory. I explained that we would try to find a third space, where both Ms. Lawrence and students would have their needs and interests met in the informational texts they selected. A major difference in my presentation was that I stressed more often to the students that they were taking on new roles as consultants to the teacher. I explained that they were the experts in what would engage
them best in reading informational texts, and that Ms. Lawrence needed their expert advice. As with iteration A students, the iteration B students appeared to be very attentive during the presentation and also indicated that they understood the ideas and goals I had presented.

Then, just as in iteration A, Ms. Lawrence asked students to open their laptops and look for an email she had sent them. The email contained the link to the document that I had created called “Guide for Recommending an Informational Text” (see Appendix J). As before, this document gave students information to guide them through the recommendation process. Once students had located this email and document, Ms. Lawrence used it to introduce students to her second space teaching goals. A major change to this part of the presentation was that Ms. Lawrence and I had discussed together ahead of time how she could offer students a broader range of topics to connect with in their searches while also meeting her own goals for teaching the required curriculum. Instead of asking students to find articles related to a single unit of study, Ms. Lawrence explained to students that she needed informational texts that could help them prepare for their North Carolina Final Exams, a state-provided final exam that required students to read a variety of new texts and answer questions about them based on the Common Core standards. That meant that Ms. Lawrence’s second space goals were to find texts that could serve as rich sources for textual analysis, rather than to find texts that related to a certain topic. She did, however, ask that students try to relate their choices to any one of the units of study they had completed over the course of the semester, so that the search would serve as a review of the semester’s studies. That meant that students could look for informational texts that somehow related to any of their studies instead of being limited to connections with one topic, book, or theme as was the case in iteration A.
Another difference between iteration A and iteration B was that I slightly altered the “Guide for Recommending an Informational Text” (see Appendix J) by removing the bullet item called “Checking Lexile Levels.” This part of the process had taken too much time and caused confusion for the iteration A group. By removing this step, I streamlined the process and reduced the time it would take for students to find and recommend a text to their teacher. Instead of showing students how to run a text through the Lexile analyzer, the teacher simply explained how Lexile levels were part of the consideration for finding texts and showed them samples of what the different levels looked like. So ultimately, iteration B students had fewer limitations and fewer steps to consider for meeting their teacher’s second space goals.

After Ms. Lawrence explained her second space goals, I again reminded students that they were expert consultants to the teacher, and that as they kept the teacher’s second space guidelines in mind, they should also remember their own first space goals and search for the texts that they found personally interesting and meaningful. Then, just as I had for iteration A, I showed students a Symbaloo link to several sites where they could begin looking. I also informed them that they could conduct additional searches through Google or another search engine they preferred.

The Search for Informational Texts

As planned based on experiences with iteration A class, I had asked Ms. Lawrence to set aside and protect the time students had for all parts of the process, including time to search for informational texts. Ms. Lawrence was happy to agree to this request; in addition, her set daily class schedule also supported this plan. The iteration B class met during third period each day, a time when students also went to lunch. The class returned from lunch each day with exactly 30 minutes remaining for the class period. This time was easier to
protect since the class had no choice but to stop for lunch at the same time each day. As part of the first day plan, Ms. Lawrence and I presented to students during the last 15 minutes before lunch, and once students returned from lunch, they had a full 30 minutes to begin the search. After the second day of searching, many students had already found and recommended two or more texts. At the end of the second day, Ms. Lawrence asked students to raise their hands if they had been able to find and recommend at least two texts that they wanted to study. Most students raised their hands. Next she asked students to raise their hands if they needed more time to recommend texts, to which no students raised their hands. Since all students indicated that they did not need more time, Ms. Lawrence and I decided to cancel the third planned session of searching.

For the iteration B students, the search began with an enthusiasm that never seemed to dissipate. Students searched the sites and texts according to their own interests, and all students seemed engaged in the search, with 100% of students on task, self-regulating their behaviors, and expressing satisfaction for some of the texts they were finding. The only point at which students asked questions or expressed any confusion was the first time they wanted to submit a text. At this point, some students had found a text that they liked, and they had forgotten how to get to the link to submit the text to their teacher. I simply reminded them to go back to the bottom of the guide sheet, which solved the problem. At no point did students ask me or Ms. Lawrence if what they had found was acceptable. The students demonstrated enthusiasm and confidence in what they were finding, as evidenced by the lack of questions overall, the high level of general engagement in the task, and the comments from students on their student feedback questionnaires. Here are a few representative samples:
Buck: I feel like someone cares about our opinion and I feel really good to be able to pick what we might be able to learn about.

Curly Sue: I felt confident about being able to pick certain texts for the class to read in the future, or future classes.

Jimkay: I was excited about let Ms. Lawrence know what I want and like to read about.

Carson: I felt like it was a great idea for us to be able to give our teacher information about what we think is best sometimes about things.

Gabrielle: I like it, because it gives us a chance to actually voice our opinion on the things that we like. For once, we don't have to actually be told what to do, we get to say what we like also.

Marie: I felt like we weren't students for those few days we did the project, but like we were consultants with our teacher. I felt like we had some power.  

(questionnaire responses, December 19, 2013).

These types of responses indicated that the students felt confident and enthusiastic about being asked to find and recommend informational texts to their teacher. The comments also suggest that students experienced a heightened sense of student agency.

However, as with iteration A, there was one student in iteration B who had been unable to find something she wanted to submit and was not as pleased with the results. Brianna, one of the students whose survey response indicated that she had a low-range attitude toward reading, had wanted to find an informational text about animals. Yet she was the only participating student who did not submit a text to the teacher. She commented on her feedback questionnaire that “I really don’t care for it like that, but at times I liked it” (questionnaire response, December 19, 2013). At the time Ms. Lawrence and I decided to cancel the third day of searches for texts, we believed that every student had submitted at least one informational text, and possibly two or three. Ms. Lawrence had asked the students
to raise their hands if they had not had the chance to submit at least one informational text
that they liked. When no one raised their hands, we made the decision to cancel the third day
of searching. When I told Ms. Lawrence later that Brianna had not submitted a text, she
commented that Brianna worked very slowly and sometimes refused to complete work for
class. When I interviewed Brianna about the experience, she talked about an article that she
had been reading at the time:

It was about, the, ahm, the great—the—what’s it called? Oh yeah, the Great
Depression, about the animals, how they used to treat the animals back then.
Because I didn’t get to finish reading it and stuff. I didn’t want to send it to
her just like the first part of it. I liked it and stuff. I think she would like it,
but I wasn’t sure because I didn’t get to finish reading the whole thing.
(December 20, 2013)

So although Ms. Lawrence believed that Brianna sometimes did not finish her work on
purpose, it may have simply been that Brianna was a slower reader and possibly less
confident than some of the other students in submitting her selection to the teacher. This lack
of confidence was also apparent in the interview, when she seemed worried whether or not
she was doing a good job of answering my questions. I could tell that she was very nervous
throughout, and she had trouble understanding some of the questions. Nevertheless, she did
indicate some positive feelings about recommending texts to the teacher through her desire to
“show the teacher [students] know some good stuff—instead of doing the same thing over
and over” (interview response, December 20, 2013). At the end of the interview, she said,
“I’m just a little nervous. I don’t think I did good,” to which I responded, “Oh no! You did a
great job!” (December 20, 2013). After talking with Brianna and observing her shyness and
anxiety over her own performance, I was not surprised that she did not raise her hand in class
as directed. Her lack of confidence and a lack of sufficient time to read may have prevented
Brianna from submitting a text, and likely caused some of her mixed feelings about the
study. These same characteristics may also negatively affect her feelings about reading in school overall as indicated in her reading attitude survey.

**Students’ Recommendations**

The participating students from iteration B recommended 27 different informational texts to their teacher. The following table lists a sample of the informational texts each student recommended to Ms. Lawrence in the order they were submitted, including why they recommended the texts and how they perceived the texts as different from what they typically read in school. When students indicated a favorite, I chose it for the sample. In addition, I included two texts submitted by Allinson, since both were selected by the teacher as two of her top choices.

**Table 9. Recommended Informational Texts (form submissions, December 16-17, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Students’ Justifications</th>
<th>How Different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curly Sue</td>
<td>Tavernise, S. (2013, January 16). Segregation linked in study with lung cancer deaths. <em>The New York Times</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/17/health/study-links-segregation-and-lung-cancer-deaths-in-blacks.html">http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/17/health/study-links-segregation-and-lung-cancer-deaths-in-blacks.html</a></td>
<td>This article should be used because it explains the connection between segregated counties and lung cancer. The more segregated the counties are, the more African Americans they have being diagnosed with this cancer. It may make other African Americans aware and not build any connections in a segregated county or state.</td>
<td>We rarely connect diseases, cancers, or any other type of health disorder with what we are reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buck</td>
<td>Heavey, B. (2013, April 5). Hunting your own dinner. <em>The New York Times</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/hunting">http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/hunting</a>_ and_trapping/</td>
<td>I think it is important because for a lot of kids in high school hunt and for a lot of them that just about all they do. and for those that don't like to hunt it will be good for them to be informed all about hunting so that they know it's not a bad thing but a good thing.</td>
<td>In school we never talk about hunting or fishing. with all the county people that go to this school it would be really entertaining to those people if we talked about something that we like to do and it is talking about something they are trying to take away from us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle</td>
<td>Us Weekly Editors. (2013, December 13). Celebrity Makeup Malfunctions. <em>Us Weekly</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.us">http://www.us</a> magazine.com/celebrity-news/pictures/celebrity-makeup-malfunctions-20131312 /34594</td>
<td>I think this should be included because i find this interesting and even a little humorous. Not all things that we learn in class have to be about school.</td>
<td>It’s different because in school we have to read things that are “school appropriate” and mainly, the things that we read in school are boring to me. This test actually has interesting things to read about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rese</td>
<td>Brecher, J. (2013, December 17). Small world of murder. <em>NBC News</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/12/17/21864122-small-world-of-">http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/12/17/21864122-small-world-of-</a></td>
<td>This text should be included in the teacher's lesson because it facts about what the real world is like. It also shows how the Chicago police have been working to get this decrease in homicides. People can become interesting</td>
<td>What we typically read are, adventures books and educational books and them are boring to me. This article is educational to, but it has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Murder-As-Homicides-Drop-Chicago-Police-Focus-On-Social-Networks-Of-Gangs</td>
<td>This text should be included in Ms. Hodges' lesson because I know it would draw most of the students' attention. Most of my classmates use smartphones and obviously know what Snapchat is considering everyone with a phone uses it. It would be a new and fresh learning experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>Disruptions: Internet's Sad Legacy: No More Secrets</td>
<td>This text is different from what I normally read in school in the way that it is about modern technology and the security of technology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La'Shay</td>
<td>Subjective Lives: Mrs. Poe</td>
<td>This story should be included because it's different and Edgar Allen Poe is a good writer. They also should include it be tell about his background. It tell his wife name and his friends name.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allinson</td>
<td>In Defense of a Loaded Word</td>
<td>This could be used because some people are still not treated equally and they debated on how the N word should be used should it be used by blacks or should it be used at all?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>How Girls with Autism Are Being Shortchanged</td>
<td>This text is different because we do not normally read about mental conditions or health issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibi</td>
<td>High and Low: Online Flash Sales Go Beyond Fashion to Survive</td>
<td>This article is informational text because it will inform the reader about how flash sales were financially successful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Blazers, Suns Leads This Season's Biggest Surprise</td>
<td>This should be in the teachers lesson since some people could like reading about the underdogs in this case the Suns and the Blazers. If we read more interesting things like this about people who do way better than expected since they put in the work to be great. This is a good topic since it can mean more than just about basketball. It could be more about doing what others think you cant but you prove them wrong if you work hard enough.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JimKay</td>
<td>Signs of CTE</td>
<td>This is different since most readings we do are about random things that are boring. Students rather read something more fun and entertaining to them no matter what it is. This could be a good article since some people could relate to people doubting them and then they end up proving them wrong. Also doing what they said they cant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson</td>
<td>I Think This Text and Information Should Be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>This is a good book it has action and it's a fun book to read. This is a book that most people can read and get in to the book.</td>
<td>included in our lesson because we as students need to know the consequences and the way things are and where we stand with us and our teachers and how relationships can be with our teachers because we never learned that in school.</td>
<td>something different, something I never learned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berl, E. (2012, May 20). Is segregation back in U.S. Public Schools? <em>The New York Times</em>. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/05/20/is-segregation-back-in-us-public-schools">http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/05/20/is-segregation-back-in-us-public-schools</a></td>
<td>This information should be included in the lesson because it is showing that children are being segregated not because of there color but because of there economic status. (My Favorite)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allinson</td>
<td>My #1.......Its talking about how many whites are afraid of black men and how they use that in court that white men are afraid of black men so they may use self defense. This should be included in the teacher lesson because we could compare how Huck was not afraid of Jim to this article when they are saying that white men are afraid of black men when they are all equal they are all men just different racist.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>This article is interesting because it tells about our future as a nation in space and on the moon and were we are going to be going with our future life in space. what we will build how we will build and the search for life in space.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petersen, S. (2013, June 13). NBA fans attack 11-year-old's national anthem with racist tweets. <em>Deseret News</em>. <a href="http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865581621/Racist-NBA-fans-attack-11-year-olds-national-anthem.html">http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865581621/Racist-NBA-fans-attack-11-year-olds-national-anthem.html</a></td>
<td>This article should be included in my teacher's lesson because it is teaching us about racism and it relates to the Brown vs. Education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just as with iteration A, the texts students recommended reflected the reading interests they described in their survey comments, such as sports, action, and real-life experiences.

Although students had fewer limitations from the teacher’s second space since they did not have to connect with a certain topic or unit of study, some students still asserted their first space goals beyond the second space boundaries. For example, Harris shared the link to a favorite fiction book, and La’shay submitted a book review about a piece of historical fiction,
demonstrating that they may have preferred texts more related to fiction. And although Ms. Lawrence did not require students to connect their texts to the theme of racism, it was clear that many of the course readings from American literature, documents, and court decisions led to those connections in students’ selections. When explaining how their recommendations were different from what they typically read in school, many students commented that the topics were more interesting, about something they could relate to, “more open” in dealing with sensitive issues, and just different from the usual topics in school. I discuss students’ text selections in comparison to typical school texts more in chapter six.

Interestingly, many students in iteration B seemed compelled to comment upon the importance of the information in the texts they recommended. Buck explained that it “would be good for them to be informed all about hunting so that they know it’s not a bad thing but a good thing” (form submission, December 16, 2013). Curly Sue explained that she thought her article “may make other African-Americans aware” of lung cancer dangers (form submission, December 17, 2013). Carl submitted an article about dangerous plays at homebase, and shared, “I think we should include this in the lesson because what these base runners are doing are seriously hurting people” (form submission, December 17, 2013). Carson explained that her article about sexual harassment was important because “we as students’ need to know the consequences and the way things are and where we stand with us and our teachers” (form submission, December 17, 2013). So although the students often commented that their selections were interesting, many students also believed that their recommendations deserved attention because of the important information they contained.
In summary, students in iteration B expressed enthusiasm and interest in the opportunity to recommend informational texts to the teacher. Students also appeared to be engaged in the task of finding informational texts and never demonstrated the frustration or confusion with the task as did iteration A students. This may have resulted from the fact that in iteration B, we eased the task by removing the Lexile analyzer step and increased the openness to connect with any of the semester’s studies. Although one iteration B participant was unable to find and recommend a selection to her own satisfaction, most students responded to their teacher’s request to find informational texts with a sense of confidence, in both the search for texts and the recommendation of texts. Students explained that they could relate to the texts they recommended because the texts dealt with real-life and covered sensitive topics more openly. Finally, several iteration B students indicated that their text selections were important because of the crucial information the texts contained rather than simply because they were interesting.

**Negotiating to Satisfaction—Findings for Secondary Research Question #2**

*What happens when students and teachers negotiate which informational texts will be studied? In what ways can students influence teachers’ selection of informational texts?* To answer the research question, I first explain in detail the protocol used in iteration B for negotiation. Afterward, I describe what happened during the negotiation process and explain how the negotiations compared to negotiations for iteration A. Finally, I consider in what ways students were able to influence the teacher’s selection of informational texts.

**Protocol for Negotiation**

As explained earlier, the protocols were adjusted to decrease barriers to student agency as recommended by iteration A participants and my own observations. In addition,
Ms. Lawrence helped to plan the timing and details for each step in the protocol. As a result, each of the following steps for negotiation (in italics), along with a brief explanation, was used for study iteration B:

(a) *Ms. Lawrence explained to students that her first selections were not final and that she would need the help of her expert consultants to consider any changes.* By reminding her students that they were expert consultants, she and the students may have remembered to set aside their traditional roles, at least temporarily.

(b) *She sent students an email (see Appendix K) that listed her top selections and other potentially usable selections, along with a link to the texts for students to review.* This step gave students easy access to each of the texts their teacher was considering for use, and students could see the entire text online in its original multimedia format rather than just relying on their teacher’s description or having to go find the texts on their own.

(c) *Then students had 45 minutes in class to review the teacher’s selections and provide their consultant feedback through a Google form (see Appendix L).* The time students were afforded in class allowed them to become more knowledgeable about the texts Ms. Lawrence was choosing from. This also gave students time to plan and send their feedback to Ms. Lawrence. The use of email and a Google form for communication allowed students to give their feedback without worrying what their peers would think of their comments or opinions and without worrying that their teacher would openly reject their suggestions.

(d) *Finally, Ms. Lawrence presented to the entire class how she had considered their feedback in making her final selections for use in a future lesson.* This occurred after the teacher had a chance to review all of the students’ feedback, thereby allowing the teacher to gain an overview of students’ comments before responding. This protocol also allowed Ms. Lawrence to respond to her students’ feedback collectively rather than individually as had occurred during the protocol for iteration A.

What follows is a description of what happened as iteration B participants used this new classroom protocol for negotiation of informational texts.
What Happened During Negotiations

Students had recommended texts to the teacher during class on Monday and Tuesday, and the negotiations occurred on Wednesday. For the first part of the class period, students worked on writing research papers, which were due on Friday, the last day of class before Christmas break. With 20 minutes remaining before students left for lunch, Ms. Lawrence asked students to pause in their work on the research papers to look at the email she had sent them (see Appendix K). She told the students that they had sent her “some really excellent articles” and that she had “thought a great deal about which ones would be best to use” (fieldnotes, December 18, 2013). She then reminded them, “As my consultants, I need you to take a look and see which ones most interest you” (fieldnotes, December 18, 2013). Ms. Lawrence also explained that she had sent them a Google form for sending their feedback.

At this point, students began reviewing the informational texts from the teacher’s email, which contained the teacher’s “top three picks” and six additional “great articles” students suggested (see Appendix K). Ms. Lawrence used the opportunity to work at her desk in the front of the room, while I stood in the back of the classroom looking to see what texts students were choosing to read on their laptops. Students were extremely quiet and focused on their laptop screens as they reviewed the texts initially. After students read through the texts for several minutes, two students called me over to ask what they should do next. I decided to explain the next steps to everyone in case others were also confused:

I’m going to interrupt your thinking to make sure everybody gets it. So that long list of texts that she sent you, right? The top three are the ones she’s going to use unless you tell her something different, unless you recommend she make some changes. So if you look at the top three, and if you wouldn’t be interested in reading them, you need to tell her that and tell her why. And then you need to look at the list below it. Those were some that she liked. She says, ‘hey, you know I might consider these. These are pretty good.’ Should she substitute some of those for the top three because you didn’t like
the top three? I mean, it could turn out that you like the top three. But there are a whole lot of texts there to skim through. Read enough of it to know for sure if it’s worth studying or not. If you have any questions call me over. (fieldnotes, December 18, 2013)

After that, no other students called me over with questions, and they seemed to know what to do.

Students seemed to be drawn to three texts in particular, one text from the teacher’s top three called “In Defense of a Loaded Word” about using the word *nigger*, another text from the teacher’s top three about concussions in football, and another not in the teacher’s top three about racist tweets when a Hispanic boy sang the national anthem at a basketball game. When viewing these three texts, students demonstrated all four of Guthrie’s (2004) indicators of reading engagement as 1) students kept their eyes clearly focused on their laptop screens, 2) students seemed motivated to read the texts without external motivators reviewing multiple texts at will, 3) students whispered about some of the texts recommending them to others, and 4) students would sometimes ask their neighbors how to get to an article the others were talking about. (See Appendix B to view all observation protocols for engagement.) Once the whispering reached a certain level, Ms. Lawrence responded, “Guys, there’s no talking. You’re reading” (fieldnotes, December 18, 2013). Students then remained quiet and read texts online until the bell rang for them to go to lunch.

When students returned from lunch, they were very talkative and laughing a lot. Many students were talking about Rese’s new tattoo. Ms. Lawrence was also more relaxed after lunch and seemed open to talking as well, which was rather unusual based on my previous visits when the teacher usually required students to stop talking. The students and Ms. Lawrence chatted and laughed together, and during this time, students continued reviewing the articles and sending in their recommendations through the Google form. Ms.
Lawrence interrupted at one point to tell students about a link to some Harvard University psychological tests that she found in connection with the Stand Your Ground text that was on the list. She said that they may want to take a look at those, which several students did. The remainder of the class period was spent in great congeniality. Talking continued on and off about the texts while students finished reading through them and sending in their feedback through the Google form. The only student who appeared to be disengaged during the time to negotiate and send feedback was Brianna. Her eyes were often closed, and at one point she stretched and shook her head as if trying to wake herself up. When students finished sending their recommendations, they continued working on their research papers until the final bell.

The following table presents the negotiations feedback students submitted to Ms. Lawrence in order of students’ reading attitude survey results, from low-range to high-range attitudes:

**Table 10. Consultant Recommendations (form submissions, December 18, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultants</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buck</td>
<td>I really like all three of the articles. They are all very interesting and are all three different. It will be very interesting to what how our class acts when we hit on the racial articles. I also really like the one about football. (CTE) I was even reading that one yesterday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>I like the articles you chose but the one that I liked the most was where the former NFL players were tested for CTE by UCLA university and all the players where tested positive for CTE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curly Sue</td>
<td>Replace Stand Your Ground Debate in Florida with A Florida High School, named after a Confederate soldier, gets rid of its name. This article seems more interesting than the first one because the first one doesn't look like something we, as a class would like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>I personally like the articles Ms. Lawrence chose, and won’t have any trouble reading them I think they are all interesting and will be informational for me to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimkay</td>
<td>The first article is dealing with racism. This goes along well with both of the books we have read in class. the books are &quot;Of mice and Men&quot; and &quot;The adventures of Huck Finn.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Racism was a strong problem in both of the books. The second articles also has to do with racism. The difference between the first two articles is that the second one focuses more on the N-word. So the first two articles go very well with the things we have already done in class. The third article I just really love because I love football. I played it for 5 years and I loved it. So I always love to read about football because it is my favorite hobby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La’shay</td>
<td>I strongly agree with the choices you made because it's educated and give informational text about the article. It's somehow related to other stories we read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rese</td>
<td>I like all the articles you have choose they will be very interesting to the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>there good because there fun to read and I want to read them they make it easier to read because I want to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>My favorite article out of the top three Ms. Lawrence chose was the NFL players being diagnosed with CTE, however, I did like the first two also because it will relate to a lot that we have learned and it is making racism a known problem and hopefully people reading these article will stop the racism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allinson</td>
<td>I agree with the articles she have picked but I would also like to read and talk more about the NBA fans attacking the 11 year old Hispanic with Racist tweets. The article shows that people are not only racist towards blacks but other cultures to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson</td>
<td>I think the stories you choose are good but i really want you to choose the one about the boy getting suspended for hugging his teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Out of the Three stories I only like the one about NFL and the other one about the n word. Those are good topics since the n word one is one we can relate to since we discussed the n word issue in class while we was reading huckleberry finn. The issue is still a good topic for use to read about and discuss more. The NFL topic is good also since they can talk more about protection for the players since some people probably enjoy and like football. They would most likely agree on having more protection for NFL players and the problem of having concussions can hopefully get around more. I think you should add the link about Chicago and the lowered homicides from last year since it tells good information on how they lowered crime and more efficient was to stop crime those should be the top three articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>I think Ms. Lawrence should remove the article on the correlation between NFL players and concussions. This has nothing to do with an English class, unlike the other two which correlate with the racism subject that we have gone over in reading The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The appropriate class to use an article like this for a reading comprehension assignment would be something like Health Teen Relations, Sports Medicine, and Med Science. A good replacement would be the one about Tim Cook’s public response on the civil rights of homosexuals. While this has nothing to do with racism, it has everything to do with discrimination. I think if these students see someone as successful as the CEO of Apple computers being fully supportive of homosexual rights, they may learn a lesson on tolerance and acceptance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Michelle  | I believe you should add this article to your top 3 because this article is more of an attention grabber than a few of the other articles.  
Gabrielle and Tibi were absent on the day this part of the study was conducted. Brianna was present but she did not submit any recommendations through the form. As the students’ feedback indicated, ten students approved of Ms. Lawrence’s top three choices. A few of the students recommended adding a text to the top three, or perhaps even switching one out, but only two of the students agreed about a change: Michelle and Rocky wanted the teacher to keep her top three picks and add the text about murder rates in Chicago. Many students’ responses indicated that they had thought carefully about their decisions and were knowledgeable about multiple texts. For example, Jimkay, Allinson, Darren, and Rocky gave specific reasons and details to support why each text they mentioned would or would not work for the lesson.

On the following day, Ms. Lawrence presented her final selections. All students appeared to be engaged in the presentation, as indicated by 1) their eye contact with the teacher as she spoke, 2) their self-regulated behavior which required no reminders or correction from the teacher, 3) their participation and interaction with Ms. Lawrence when she asked a question or when they reacted at her comments, and 4) their enthusiastic interactions with the teacher, such as when they laughed or when they offered another detail to support something the teacher said about a text. Indeed, they interacted with the teacher throughout, never seeming to drift away in their focus on the discussion. She first explained that most students recommended she stick with her top three text selections. Next, she addressed each of the three texts, starting with the one about NFL players and concussions. The students laughed when Ms. Lawrence admitted she chose the article partially because she had grown up watching Dallas Cowboys’ football player Tony Dorsett and thought that
he was a “cutest as can be man” (fieldnotes, December 19, 2013). She and the students talked at length about the text and how sad it was that Dorsett had suffered brain damage that affected his daily life, for example that he would get lost driving his daughter to soccer games. Ms. Lawrence explained that ultimately, though, she did not feel that the text was connected closely enough to their studies in class, but that she would try to use it before the end of the semester. Next, she talked about the text discussing Florida’s Stand Your Ground law. She explained that the opinion piece, written by a Florida law professor, was very persuasive and highly complex. Although she would try to use all three texts at some point, she explained that she chose the opinion piece about the n-word that Allinson recommended for the upcoming ELA lesson. She explained that at first she was concerned because the article’s Lexile level was only in the 900s, but then she “recalled the fact that I cannot stand the whole Lexile level thing!” (fieldnotes, December 19, 2013). She ultimately chose the article for three reasons: she felt that it was indeed a complex text, it brought up the concept of separate but equal from their studies, and it presented an opinion about a tough issue—the use of the n-word in modern society. “Because who wants to talk about a tough issue—right? It’s hard to talk about a tough issue. What?!? Who am I to back away from a tough issue. Not me!” (fieldnotes, December 19, 2013). At this declaration, the students laughed, as if acknowledging the truth of her statement. Students then completed the feedback questionnaire before returning to their work on the research papers.

According to iteration B students’ responses on the feedback questionnaires, all students, with the exception of Brianna, expressed strong satisfaction with the process for text selection and negotiation based on their comments, such as “I feel like someone cares about our opinion” (Buck, questionnaire response, December 19, 2013) and “I like it because
it gives us a chance to actually voice our opinion” (Gabrielle, questionnaire response, December 19, 2013). Brianna, in contrast, answered “I really don’t care for it like that but at times I like it” (questionnaire response, December 19, 2013). All students, including Brianna, responded positively to the question *Do you think you and your teacher were able to negotiate a "third space"? Why or why not.* Consider these representative answers:

- Bob: Yes because she could see what we were interested in reading and could reason with it.
- Jimkay: Yes I think we found a third space. We found a third space because we found articles that we find exciting to read and that can also work in class.
- Allinson: Yes because I told her why I recommended the article she agreed and the article was selected to read as a class.
- Carson: Yeah i think we did because she agreed to use the article to teach and based off what we picked.
- Rocky: Yes we was able to find a third space since she let us get to pick what articles we read. This is what we should do more to get more reading done.
- Darren: Yes, because when the articles chosen were discussed, the students were able to get on common ground with the teacher. Sharing similar opinions and agreeing with different ones.

(questionnaire responses, December 19, 2013)

**Improvements over Iteration A**

The problems noted in iteration A, when students had little time or structure for sharing their recommendations safely, did not appear to have occurred in iteration B. First, because students had time to review other recommended texts thoroughly before beginning the negotiations, they were likely more knowledgeable and therefore better prepared to offer feedback to the teacher. The time for review also allowed students to appreciate other students’ text selections rather than feel rejected when their own texts were not ultimately
selected. Secondly, Ms. Lawrence provided plenty of time (45 minutes compared to 15 minutes in iteration A) for students to consider all of the options and submit their feedback and recommendations for changes. This allowed more students an opportunity to express their opinions as desired. Third, the students and teacher did not appear overly restricted by traditional roles since the students did not ask for validation that their choices were good ones, and the teacher did not openly evaluate the quality of students’ choices or reasoning. Rather, she focused on the qualities of the texts themselves and their usefulness to the lesson. Finally, because the teacher and students conducted their negotiations primarily through electronic media, the teacher and students may have avoided the social risks associated with openly challenging each other’s choices in class, which may have reduced the potential for negative emotions. Of course, these findings are tempered with the understanding that differences between outcomes in iteration A and iteration B may well result from differences in contexts and participants rather than from adjustments to the procedures.

Summary

Iteration B students expressed satisfaction with the process for negotiation and with their teacher’s final selections. Observations and students’ comments indicated that the iteration B students were better prepared to negotiate with their teacher, were more comfortable in their roles as consultants, and were more satisfied with the results of the negotiations when compared to the iteration A students. However, it is difficult to know for certain if the students’ negotiations influenced the teacher’s selection of informational texts since many students encouraged the teacher to keep her initial choices. Nevertheless, the text the teacher chose to use immediately, “In Defense of a Loaded Word,” was one that interested many of the students, as evidenced by the students’ form responses and the
extensive time students spent looking at the text and whispering about it during the negotiation period. Ultimately, the revised classroom protocol for negotiations may have given students the time and structure they needed to negotiate with their teacher, if not in ways that changed the teacher’s decision, at least in ways that met their own satisfaction.

**Engagement in Shared Spaces—Findings for Secondary Research Question #3**

*How do choice and negotiation influence the reading engagement of students around informational texts?* To answer this research question, I begin with a discussion of how reading engagement related to student interest for students in iteration B. Afterward, I consider how the process of negotiation influenced students’ reading engagement. Finally, I describe what happened with regard to reading engagement when the selected informational text was used during an ELA lesson.

**Influence of Student Choice and Interest on Engagement**

Evidence from my two initial observations of Ms. Lawrence’s class demonstrated that students were not engaged in reading a teacher-selected informational text, yet they were engaged when working online to complete tasks involving elements of choice. As presented previously, when students were involved in finding and choosing images online to represent the meanings of vocabulary, students demonstrated multiple indicators of classroom engagement. However, when the teacher led students in the reading of the Declaration of Independence, few indicators for classroom engagement or reading engagement were evident. It may be that the element of choice helped to increase the students’ engagement during the vocabulary activity. However, other circumstances may have influenced the differing levels of engagement. For example, students may have been more engaged because they were reading from websites using their laptops, rather than from traditional paper copies
as with the Declaration of Independence. In addition, the Declaration of Independence may have left students more disengaged because of the text’s high level of complexity and the difficulties students experienced when trying to read and understand it. Although these other circumstances may have influenced engagement around the different texts, the observations suggested that iteration B students had the potential to be better engaged when presented with a choice of texts that interested them.

Furthermore, as in iteration A, comments from iteration B students’ text recommendations demonstrated the link for students between engagement and student choice. When students searched for informational texts that met their first space goals for reading, they demonstrated Guthrie’s (2004) indicators for engaged reading (see Appendix B). First of all, students appeared to be reading the online texts with extended focus. In addition, students demonstrated intrinsic motivation for wanting to find the informational texts, as evidenced by the students’ comments on the recommendation form. Consider the following comments from iteration B students that suggest intrinsic motivations to find these texts for themselves and others:

**Gabrielle:** I think this should be included because i find this interesting and even a little humorous. Not all things that we learn in class have to be about school. (form submission, December 17, 2013)

**Bob:** it would make us pay more attention because its also new news and its not from eight years ago I picked this subject because its things we actually want to hear about. (form submission, December 17, 2013)

**Allinson:** This text is different from what I normally read in school because it catch my attention and it informs me I can actually read this and focus and take time to think about what the article is saying because its an interesting topic. (form submission, December 17, 2013)
Buck: In school we never talk about hunting or fishing. With all the county people that go to this school it would be really entertaining to those people if we talked about something that we like to do and it is talking about something they are trying to take away from us. (form submission, December 16, 2013)

Gabrielle’s comment indicated that she wanted to contribute her selection just because it was interesting and humorous. Bob and Allinson’s comments showed that their text submissions attracted their attention and piqued their interest. Buck’s comment demonstrated that he felt his topic was important to share and would also be entertaining. Each of these reasons for recommending a text suggested an intrinsic motivation rather than an extrinsic motivation such as a requirement from the teacher. Finally, students enjoyed social interactions around the informational texts they selected, which served as another indicator of reading engagement according to Guthrie (2004). For example, during the text selection process, students shared with other students in the class what they had found, and they sometimes asked other students how to find a text that the other was viewing. Furthermore, students were strategic in their searches and could articulate how they went about reading and selecting texts. For example, Carl said that he, “found this text by going to The New York Times and searching baseball which is my favorite sport to play” (form submission, December 17, 2013), and Rocky reported that he “found this text on sports illustrated. I chose something like this since i rather read about sports, which is more fun and interesting to read about than something boring and dull” (form submission, December 17, 2013).

**Influence of Negotiation on Engagement**

Unlike in iteration A, the students in iteration B demonstrated evidence of general classroom engagement and engaged reading during the negotiation steps. The students remained on-task, read through the teacher’s initial text selections with apparent interest,
focused on particular texts for extended periods of time, and whispered to their classmates about what they were reading. Furthermore, all students were attentive as the teacher shared her reasoning for the final selection. Nevertheless, based on students’ comments on the feedback questionnaire, the difference may have resulted from students’ finding the texts personally appealing, and not because the process of negotiation influenced their engagement. Below is a sample of the students’ responses when they were asked if they would feel different about reading the texts their class recommended:

Carl: I would feel different about the articles the students chose because the people in my class have some of the same interests that I do so I think that it would be good for the class.

Curly Sue: Yes, because the texts the teacher recommends might not be in my interest to read.

Jimkay: I’m sure that I will like that articles my class picked because we are about the same age and we mostly like have more common interest.

Rese: Yes because the reading is more of what us as students approve as interesting

Harris: yes because most things the class likes it what we all like

Marie: I like reading texts my classmate recommend more than what my teacher selects for us because it is very interesting and it is about thing we like and can relate to.

Allinson: as teens we relate to a lot of things so something that they pick I will more than likely relate to also.

(questionnaire responses, December 19, 2013)

In each of these comments, students indicated that they would feel differently about the reading, not because their classmates negotiated the texts with their teacher, but because their classmates were more likely to choose interesting texts since they shared similar interests. In this way, the selection of a widely interesting text may have influenced the apparently strong
levels of engagement around the informational text during the subsequent ELA lesson when the chosen text was used.

**Reading Engagement during the ELA Lesson**

Unlike in iteration A, the ELA lesson using the student-recommended text in iteration B did result in apparently high levels of student engagement around the reading of the student-selected informational text. The lesson occurred on a Thursday during the week students had returned from Christmas break. The teacher began the lesson by distributing a set of notes entitled “Terms for English III—Informational Text” that she had printed onto card stock paper. The notes provided definitions of important terms that students had studied throughout the semester, such as author’s purpose, rhetoric, pathos, anecdote, and connotation. On the back of the card stock paper were printed “Tips for the MSL Constructed Response.” These were tips for answering the short essays required on the state-provided final exams, which would count toward 25% of students’ final course grades.

For about 20 minutes, the teacher reviewed each side of the notes. At first, most of the class appeared to be on-task and paying attention to the teacher’s intermittent questions. Ten minutes into the review session though, nearly half of the students appear distracted from the notes and the teacher’s questions. Only four students participated, Rocky being the only student who appeared particularly eager to answer the teacher’s questions. However, the classroom demeanor changed when after the initial review, Ms. Lawrence passed out paper copies of Coates’ op-ed piece entitled “In Defense of a Loaded Word” (2013, November 23) from *the New York Times*, which was one of the students’ chosen texts. Ms. Lawrence also gave students a highlighter and a piece of paper that simulated an essay question prompt from the final exam. Students were told to read the text and practice writing
an exam essay, which required them to identify the author’s point of view and analyze how the author used rhetoric to advance the point of view.

The intensity of the engagement that ensued was surprising in its contrast to students’ levels of engagement as observed in all previous lessons. First of all, every student, even Brianna, appeared to be on-task. Students were self-regulating their own behaviors, and Ms. Lawrence simply sat at her desk completing a model answer for the essay. She never had to ask any students to refocus or be quiet through the entire activity. Every student stared at the text, leaning closely over the paper for an extended period of time. It was a level of quiet in the room that I had never before observed, and very few students even shifted in their seats. It was clear when students finished the reading because their heads and shoulders would come up and they would look around as if coming back to an awareness of their surroundings. They wrote their sample essay answers with similar focus. Most students were still working when the teacher stopped them to discuss their ideas.

During the follow-up discussion, students were eager to offer answers to the Ms. Lawrence’s questions, even though they often struggled to produce the response she wanted. For example, when students initially tried to define the author’s exact point of view, they spent several minutes offering their different ideas. Ultimately, the teacher led them to reread a part of the text that suggested an answer and acknowledged that it was indeed difficult to distinguish the writer’s opinion from those of the other people he wrote about. However, students never appeared to give up on understanding this text the way they did when reading the Declaration of Independence. When the teacher tried to help students recognize one technique as anecdote, five different students attempted an answer before a correct answer was given. When students were asked to identify sections where the author
used pathos, seven different students offered answers, some arguing their point when the teacher disagreed. For example, Carl asserted that the use of the word *faggots* was an example of pathos. When the teacher said, “But how does it appeal to your emotions? That’s not a pathos appeal,” Carl explained until the teacher understood. Ms. Lawrence eventually conceded the point, “That it might appeal to your sense of yikes? Alright, I get it now” (fieldnotes, January 9, 2014). When the teacher tried to move away from the discussion of pathos, Carson contributed yet another comment, “Couldn’t it also be humor when he says ‘to prevent verifying stereotypes we pledge never to eat another slice of watermelon in front of white people’?” to which the teacher answered, “Yeah, yeah” with an apparent desire to move on (fieldnotes, January 9, 2014). Several of the students tried to offer their own personal opinions about ideas in the text, but Ms. Lawrence kept them focused on analyzing the text itself. Even after nearly 25 minutes of discussion, as Ms. Lawrence attempted to transition students out of the analysis activity by telling them they would practice analyzing a poem after lunch, students were still talking about the text with enthusiasm and interest. Overall, students demonstrated a high level of reading engagement around the selected informational text during the lesson. This suggested that perhaps the process of text recommendation and negotiation resulted in the selection of an informational text that allowed a shared space for reading engagement and discussion, one that met the students’ first space requirements for interest and the teacher’s second space requirements for teaching.

**Summary**

Study iteration B supported the findings from iteration A that reading engagement depended more upon choice and whether students found a text personally interesting than
upon the negotiation process itself. However, the more effective protocols for text selection and negotiation in iteration B may have led to the selection of an informational text that came closer to satisfying more of the students’ first space goals as well as the teacher’s second space goals. So whereas the students in iteration A became distracted during the ELA lesson around an informational text that primarily represented their teacher’s second space goals, the iteration B students remained engaged in the reading of an informational text that better represented a shared space for the ELA lesson.

**Barriers Lessened, Barriers Remain—Findings for Secondary Research Question #4**

*What are some barriers to student agency, and how can they be lessened or eliminated?* The revised classroom protocols for text recommendation and negotiation may have helped to lessen the barriers to student agency noted in iteration A. However, before further analysis in this section begins, it is important to note that the revised protocols were not the only influences on differing levels of student agency between iterations. The iteration B participants may have been more capable of enacting new forms of student agency because of differences in age and experience. The students in iteration B were in the eleventh grade as compared to ninth grade in iteration A, so were approximately two years older and possibly more comfortable in the high school setting, which may have increased their ability to claim new forms of agency, as suggested by some researchers of student agency (Biddulph, 2011; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). More research would be needed to determine whether or not this was a factor. Furthermore, Ms. Lawrence had two more years of teaching experience and many more years of work and life experience than Mr. Allen, possibly increasing her ability to invite more student agency and act with greater autonomy when making decisions for curriculum, as is suggested in some literature about differences between
experienced and inexperienced teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008). How these differences may have affected teacher and student agency are addressed in more detail in the chapter six discussion.

In order to answer the question, I first consider how changes to protocols may have lessened the influence of some barriers to student agency noted during iteration A. Then I discuss what barriers remained for iteration B, as well as some of the positive outcomes for student agency in spite of the remaining barriers.

**Changes to Lessen Barriers**

**Emphasis on new roles.** One barrier to student agency in iteration A was that participants had difficulty breaking out of traditional classroom roles, which possibly led students to ignore their own first space goals and seek confirmation from the teacher. One change made to protocols to lessen this barrier in iteration B was to emphasize to participants that students would be taking on new roles as *expert consultants*. This simple change may have reminded the participants that, at least during the study, the roles they were assuming were somewhat different than that of student. Some students noted the difference themselves. Allinson commented, “When doing the study we picked out our articles and like emailed her back and forth, she didn’t think of us as students—more like say, another teacher” (interview response, December 20, 2013). As noted earlier, Marie commented, “I felt like we weren’t students for those few days we did the project, but like we were consultants with our teacher” (questionnaire response, December 19, 2013). The emphasis on students as consultants may have helped the students in study iteration B to have more confidence in their selections. As explained earlier, the iteration B students did not seek confirmation from the adults when finding and recommending texts in the same way the
students in iteration A did. In addition, students did not appear as reluctant to share their opinions with the teacher during negotiations as did students in iteration A. Although this may have been a result of students’ older ages and experience in high school setting, the emphasis on students taking on new roles may also have helped the iteration B students to break out of their traditional roles at least temporarily.

**New roles through electronic media.** Another change to classroom protocols that may have allowed participants to break away from traditional classroom roles was that students were able to negotiate primarily through electronic media including email and Google forms. This form of communication alleviated the pressures of open classroom interactions between the teacher and students and allowed participants to avoid risky social maneuvers when recommending and criticizing text selection. Based on observations of the iteration B class prior to the introduction of the protocol, the teacher and students had the propensity for contentious interactions that resulted in the teacher asserting second space authority over students. By using electronic media to recommend and negotiate which informational texts to use, the participants avoided open confrontations. They could communicate with the teacher in ways that did not disrupt their temporary roles as experts, since the teacher had less opportunity for immediate verbal commentary or critique. The use of electronic media for communication may have also lessened any social pressure in the classroom that could have prevented students from asserting their ideas. Certainly, this form of media was familiar to most of the students, so that possibly provided a level of comfort as well. More about the use of electronic media is included in the chapter six discussion.

**Planning for flexibility.** Another barrier possibly lessened by the new protocols was the pressure the teacher felt to satisfy the demands of the curriculum. In iteration A, Mr.
Allen and I had settled on having students find an informational text connected with his unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which limited the students’ initial text searches and led to Mr. Allen’s later difficulties with incorporating the text after needing to move on to the next unit of study. To alleviate this potential pressure in study iteration B, I worked with Ms. Lawrence to plan a use for the informational text that did not tie in to a particular unit of study, thereby allowing more flexibility for the teacher as far as timing of the lesson. Ms. Lawrence planned for a lesson in textual analysis not tied to a particular unit or theme. The result was that students had fewer second space limitations for their text searches and the teacher felt less pressure to move quickly through the lesson since it had greater flexibility within the curriculum. During the final interview, when I asked Ms. Lawrence how she would describe the study and the resulting lesson she commented:

> I thought the study worked well with the kind of things that we are supposed to do in the classroom, and it encouraged me, if not supplemented my philosophy, on getting their input on things. But it certainly encouraged me to make sure that I get their input. And we were able to find a great article that fit with what we were doing, and that also fit with what they needed to know in terms of how to analyze. So it worked great. It wasn’t an additional thing. It wasn’t an additional project; it was a part of what we were going to do anyway. So I’m hoping it prepared them for their final exam. (January 13, 2014)

Based on these comments, Ms. Lawrence felt that she and her students had been successful in finding an informational text that served an important curriculum goal. Her comments also indicate that she had perhaps been worried that incorporating a student-recommended text would be an additional or even disruptive element and that she was somewhat surprised when the process for text selection supported a planned curriculum goal. Furthermore, she was encouraged her to seek students’ input for future decisions. Perhaps most interesting, though, was her use of the pronoun “we” to describe the process, as in “we were able to find a great
article,” which indicates that Ms. Lawrence viewed the process as being shared between her and her students. Through careful planning for a flexible ELA lesson ahead of time, Ms. Lawrence effectively provided more room for students’ first space goals without detracting from her own second space goals, thereby lessening the barrier to student agency that can sometimes result from pressures to meet the demands of the curriculum.

**Limiting influence of beliefs.** Changes to classroom protocols may have also helped to lessen any influence of teachers’ beliefs about some students lacking motivation. The teachers in both iterations expressed the belief that students lacked motivation. Mr. Allen believed that the process of selecting and negotiating texts with students would have been more successful if the class were comprised of more motivated students. His beliefs may have influenced his evaluative comments to students during negotiations and his decision to relegate the student-selected text to a homework assignment. Ms. Lawrence also indicated concerns about her students’ levels of motivation. During the opening interview, she commented that one challenge to teaching informational texts was students’ lacking “the motivation to try harder” (December 13, 2013). These views came into play while she was reviewing some of the students’ text selections. During our informal conversations, she made comments about some students’ recommendations, essentially questioning whether certain individuals were really making an effort. For example, Ms. Lawrence said she was not surprised when Brianna had not submitted a text since she often refused to complete assignments. (As indicated in a previous section, Brianna said in the interview that she had found a text about the treatment of animals during the Great Depression, but that she was unable to finish reading it in time to submit it.) Ms. Lawrence was most critical when Gabrielle submitted a text containing many pictures of shoes. In fact, Ms. Lawrence told me
that she just deleted the selection from her copy of the database. (More about this event is discussed in chapter six with regard to teacher and student agency.) Ms. Lawrence seemed to believe Gabrielle lacked motivation to recommend texts according to the guidelines; she did not consider that perhaps Gabrielle was expressing a strong desire to study fashion and shoes. However, the new classroom protocols may have protected Gabrielle and others from feeling disappointment or sensing a loss of agency. Because the students negotiated with their teacher through electronic media, the teacher and students had less opportunity for open conversation, and potential discouragement, about the texts they had submitted. Indeed, Ms. Lawrence’s beliefs about some students’ lack of motivation did not appear to limit the overall success of the text recommendations, negotiation, or reading engagement during the ELA lesson. And while Mr. Allen likely maintained his view of some students as unmotivated, as evidenced by his comments in the final interview that “Working with perhaps more motivated students would help that negotiation process” (December 19, 2013), Ms. Lawrence may have changed her views somewhat after seeing what she and students accomplished together. When asked during the final interview about any surprises over the course of the study or lesson, she answered, “That they were interested in the assignment. That they really wanted to find them” (January 13, 2014).

**Remaining Barriers to Student Agency**

In spite of the improved classroom protocols in iteration B, two barriers to student agency continued to exert pressure on the students and teacher during the study: time constraints and the teacher’s role as the final authority. Time constraints created pressure for teachers and students. During our informal conversations, Ms. Lawrence would make comments about needing to return to her own lesson plans soon. I could tell that she felt
pressure and that the study was a welcomed but time-consuming process. During the final interview, she explained:

The study helped me figure out a more clear assignment to make it incorporated with what the teacher’s going to do anyway. You know, ahm. Again, it’s just how do we incorporate it with what we need to do? Because there’s so little time to do what we need to do anyway. (interview response, January 13, 2014)

She acknowledged that increasing student agency tended to take more time. Consider her following recommendation for further improving the protocol:

The other thing that would have been nice, if you have all the time in the world, would be to set up a little subcommittee, and they could do all the review of the articles. And maybe they could help with the picking, the narrowing of it down. (interview response, January 13, 2014)

Students also sometimes felt the pressures of time during the study. For example, Brianna was unable to read all of the text in time to submit it to Ms. Lawrence. And several students seemed anxious to continue working on their research papers once they were finished with steps in the process. So time remained a constant pressure and potential barrier to providing students with more agency.

Another barrier to student agency that remained was the teacher’s continuing role as the final authority. Although students in iteration B responded positively to the process and indicated that they wanted more similar opportunities to help their teachers select texts and plan lessons in the future, some students recognized that their level of agency in classrooms would likely be limited by the teacher’s continued role as the final authority. Consider the following students’ comments during the interview:

Allinson: I feel that maybe [teachers] think that what we want to learn about, and how we would be more interested in learning, they probably wouldn’t take it serious.

Jimkay: It just gave me more options to pick from to make it more interesting for myself. You still had to do research.
You still had to type out and explain. It was during school. And you were still required to do all this stuff.

Buck: I guess it did change a little bit that we did kind of help out with the lesson plan. Because she don’t do like completely on that lesson, she just kind of involves it into one of her lessons too. More hers. Cause we don’t get to choose when it happens or what we’re going to talk about.

Rocky: I don’t think some teachers would agree with it. Because some teachers don’t really care about what the students have to say about, you know, because they’re the teacher and, you know, they’re the student, so you know, they think they know everything that is right. (interview responses, December 20, 2013)

The students’ comments demonstrated that they recognized the limitations of their own agency. Although they indicated having an appreciation for greater agency to recommend texts that met their first space goals, they recognized that teachers maintained the role of final authority, the one who decides how and when lessons occur, what is right, and what deserves to be taken seriously.

**Positive Outcomes for Student Agency**

Even with these barriers in place, both the students and the teacher indicated that the process, at least in some ways, increased students’ level of agency and would be valuable in other classrooms, particularly for increasing engagement around reading. As evidence of this, consider the following comments from all six interviews with students:

Buck: I think [Ms. Lawrence] learned more about the things that we like and things that we like to read that interest us a little more. She don’t have to be the only one. Students can help make the lesson too. Because like for me, I read a lot better when it’s something like it catches me and I like to read about it. So like I get into it more and I don’t want to quit reading.
Brianna: I was a little surprised that y’all let the students choose the article instead of the teacher. [I learned] that the teacher’s not the only one who could find something good to read.

Jimkay: I learned that if you wanted to talk to teachers and stuff, like if you don’t like the articles that they’re actually getting you to read and do questions on and stuff, that if you were to do the research and find an article and then give it to the teacher, she can see if it actually goes along with it and make it work. It’s possible! There’s a way to get what you want to make school more interesting.

Allinson: I feel it will motivate us more, and we’ll be more alert and want to do it more than just the normal way, them picking it and us having to do it. Because, like I said, it just help us knowing that we picked the subject and our classmates picked it, it would be more fun. I don’t read all the time, but if I could pick what I wanted to read and it was something I liked, I would read more, and I’m sure others would too.

Carson: I think [the process] would help if students were more focused in English class and not goofing off and playing. Yeah, ‘cause then they’ll take the time to actually read and think about what they want to learn about.

Rocky: I think [Ms. Lawrence] learned that students can pick something more interesting to read and not just be something short and easy to do. We can actually learn something from it. I think she learned that she could probably trust us more to like pick things to read, and we would actually like it and be more entertained by it. We usually just sit there, and everybody’s quiet, and we just listen to her talk. I think everybody would be more interactive if we like picked something that we wanted to read, and everybody was more interested and into it.

(December 20, 2013)

The students’ comments during the interviews indicated that the study opened their eyes somewhat to how they could become agents for their own learning. For example, Buck and Brianna commented that the teacher did not have to be “the only one” making decisions about curriculum. Rocky noted that the process may have taught Ms. Lawrence a similar lesson, that she “could probably trust us more to like pick things to read” (December 20, 2013). Overall, the students’ comments indicated their strong beliefs that having more
opportunities to exercise control over the texts they read in school could better engage them in reading and “make school more interesting” (Jimkay, December 20, 2013).

The teacher also indicated a new appreciation for student agency, in spite of the extra time it required for selecting reading materials. When asked what she learned from the experience during the final interview, Ms. Lawrence responded:

That I need to ask them for their input. That I need to say, I mean it’s a great idea to do the exact same thing--set up a Symbaloo, and say I need us to read an article--we’re about to read The Crucible, and I want us to read an article about teenage girl hysteria, or I want us to read an article about McCarthy. I’ve set up some sites; go find an article that you want to post for the class to read. And you know, I’ve already got the articles, you know, and so it’s tempting to do that. It’s tempting to do that, but then it takes time to do that when I’ve already got the articles printed and copied and ready to go. But would they absorb it better if they had picked it out?--which I guess is the purpose of your study, to make sure that I provide an opportunity to get input from them. (January 13, 2014)

As evidenced by these comments, Ms. Lawrence learned that she needed to ask for her students input more often in the future. Her greater appreciation for seeking student input is an important piece of learning since, as indicated in the comments, it would be much easier for her to simply use what materials she has already collected. Although providing “an opportunity to get input from [students]” (Ms. Lawrence, interview response, January 13, 2014) may be a limited form of student agency, it is a necessary step toward valuing the first spaces of students who have traditionally not been consulted for decisions about curriculum (Biddulph, 2011; Brooker & Macdonald, 1999).

Summary

The data collected during study iteration B suggested that the new classroom protocols lessened the influence of barriers to student agency. With the new protocols in place, iteration B participants managed to move slightly away from traditional classroom
roles. In addition, the iteration B teacher was better able to satisfy the demands of the curriculum while also providing more room for students’ first space goals. And finally, any doubts the teacher harbored about individual students’ motivations did not appear to affect the success of the text selection, negotiation, and reading engagement during the ELA lesson for iteration B. However, two barriers to student agency continued to exert pressure on participants during the study: time constraints and the teacher’s traditional role as the final authority. Nevertheless, participants in iteration B indicated that the process of students recommending and negotiating texts with their teacher was valuable, particularly for increasing students’ level of interest and engagement in reading. Rocky’s comment serves as a strong closing statement for how seeking third spaces can increase student agency around reading: “I learned that building a third space can help the students and teachers more, because if you find out what the students like to read that can also be educational, then we can compromise together and learn and find something good to read” (interview response, December 20, 2013).

In the next section, I integrate the findings from iteration A and iteration B to answer the primary research question about what set of circumstances would allow students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum.

**Breaking the Bank—Findings for the Primary Research Question**

It’s possible! There’s a way to get what you want to make school more interesting. (Jimkay, interview response, December 20, 2013)

In many ways, Friere’s “banking” system of education demonstrated its stronghold on classroom cultures in this study. This is rather unsurprising considering that for hundreds of years in American education, “the teacher knows everything and the students know
nothing...the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply...the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” (Friere, 1986, p. 72-73). Indeed, it was difficult for participants to imagine and enact a new set of roles, a new form of interaction, and a new way to choose curriculum. However, the study did at least begin to answer the primary research question: What set of circumstances would allow students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum? In this section, I summarize what I believe the findings suggest would be the ideal set of circumstances for allowing students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum. Then in the next chapter, I discuss a model that better describes what actually happened in this study, compared to what would need to occur for true co-construction of third spaces.

Based on findings in iterations A and B, iteration B came closer to finding circumstances that allowed for shared negotiation, as evidenced by iteration B participants’ feedback and the teacher’s reflections indicating overall satisfaction with the negotiation process and the final text selection. This is also supported by the greater levels of student engagement around the informational texts used in the ELA lesson for iteration B. However, neither iteration fully met the circumstances for shared negotiation mainly because the teacher maintained a much greater level of agency than students. Findings from iterations A and B suggested that there are two overarching sets of circumstances that must be met for students and teachers to negotiate effectively around text selection or other choices for curriculum: first, the teacher must feel that his or her second space goals are protected, and secondly, the students must feel that their first space goals are protected. What follows is a detailed discussion of what specific elements would allow for each of these overarching circumstances to be met based on occurrences during the two iterations of this study.
Protecting Teachers’ Second Space Goals.

In order for negotiation around the curriculum to be possible, teachers must believe that their second space goals are protected throughout the process. This requires a sustained belief in the following related ideas:

- Time spent negotiating choices with students is time well spent.
- Students can make responsible choices as long as they are well prepared.
- Students’ choices can be used to serve the goals of the curriculum.

Beyond these beliefs, teachers would also need certain external circumstances important to teacher agency, including teacher autonomy in lesson planning, the support of school and district administrators, and sufficient school resources. Without one of these beliefs, circumstances, or resources in place, teachers would not be able to protect their own second space goals or effect change when negotiating choices for curriculum with students.

Negotiating with students is time well spent. The first prerequisite belief is that time spent negotiating choices with students is time well spent. Such a belief contrasts starkly with the traditional “banking” system of education, where “the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” (Friere, 1986, p. 73). Certainly, traditional roles make little room for negotiation with students. However, even if teachers generally believe that students should have more agency in the selection of texts, they may struggle with the issue of time. Because teachers have so much to teach and assess within a limited time frame, they naturally feel the need to protect the time they have.

For the teacher participants in this study, both indicated that they believed, at least theoretically, that providing students with time to recommend texts and negotiate was worthwhile. Recall that Mr. Allen mentioned conducting his own similar research project
while student teaching, and Ms. Lawrence acknowledged that if students chose their own
texts that they would enjoy the greater sense of agency. However, as explained in previous
findings, time remained a constant pressure for both teachers to manage. Their concerns
were quite reasonable considering that in this and many other states, teachers feel mounting
pressures with regard to teacher evaluation. The teacher participants in this study were well
aware that at the end of the semester their students would be required to take the state final
exam for English I or English III as a way to measure student growth based on the new
standards. The results not only provided students with 25% of their final grade in the course,
they provided teachers with an effectiveness rating that became part of their overall
evaluations as teachers.

Clearly the stakes are high for teachers with regard to how they spend their time with
students. Before this process will work, then, teachers must believe not only that students
should be participants in the process of text selection, but also that the time spent doing so
would be worthwhile to their overall goals. Without this prerequisite belief, many teachers
would avoid negotiating choices with their students in order to protect their second space
goals of covering the curriculum as planned.

**Students can make responsible choices.** The second prerequisite belief required of
teachers is that their students can make responsible choices as long as they are well prepared.
Both teacher participants in the study were concerned about their students’ levels of
motivation and whether or not they would conduct their searches with care. Mr. Allen
indicated that his students lacked the ability to evaluate and choose high-quality texts and
that the entire process was hindered by his students’ lack of motivation. However, the
problems during iteration A may have resulted from weaknesses in the classroom protocols,
which had not adequately prepared students to take on new roles or helped them to select and negotiate texts with greater confidence. Although Ms. Lawrence believed that some individuals in her class lacked motivation and the ability to make responsible choices, the improved classroom protocols may have resulted in better text selections and more effective negotiations. The result in iteration B was that the students surprised their teacher by the quality of some of their selections and their overall levels of motivation.

However, teachers’ beliefs about certain groups of students may influence whether the teacher would be willing to initiate negotiations with the students around curriculum. Although Ms. Lawrence was pleased with the results of the process for her participating class, in the final interview she indicated that the process would benefit her honors-level class more. When Ms. Lawrence commented on the value of getting input from students, she explained, “Yes, I think there is value, especially in high school. They want to have input. And I think this is one way I could do that, especially with my honors classes” (January 13, 2014). So both teachers in the study believed negotiating around choices for the curriculum would be more successful with certain groups of students. I discuss this further in chapter six.

Without the belief that their students could make careful, responsible choices if properly prepared, few teachers would be willing to risk their second space goals by implementing and adjusting protocols for negotiating curriculum choices with students. Sadly, the student groups that perhaps need most to renegotiate what curriculum is selected may actually be the same groups that teachers doubt can do so.

**Students’ choices can serve the curriculum.** The third prerequisite belief required of teachers is that students’ choices can be used to serve the goals of the curriculum, and, as
an extension, that the curriculum itself can be fluid enough to allow for this. During iteration A, the protocol did not include helping the teacher to plan a lesson that allowed students more room for their first space goals while also serving an important second space goal within the required curriculum. The result was that students had little room within which to explore their first space goals, and Mr. Allen did not feel confident in using the students’ recommended text during a lesson. He even suggested that he perhaps not use the text since he needed to move on to the unit on *Romeo and Juliet*. This experience illustrates the importance of the teacher carefully considering ahead of time how students’ choices can serve the second space goals of the curriculum.

Through careful planning, Ms. Lawrence found a use for students’ text selection that served her goals for the curriculum as well as the students’ goals for reading interest. Ms. Lawrence was surprised to learn that she could incorporate the text in such a way that “it was a part of what we were going to do anyway” (interview response, January 13, 2014). Without the belief that the students’ choices could effectively serve their second space goals for the curriculum, teachers would not risk precious instructional time negotiating with students.

**External circumstances for teacher agency.** Although these three teacher beliefs are prerequisites for teacher and student negotiations, certain external circumstances are also required for teachers to have the agency they need to effect change in the curriculum. These include teacher autonomy in lesson planning, the support of school and district administrators, and sufficient school resources.

First of all, the teacher participants in this study had a certain amount of autonomy in their lesson planning. Mr. Allen’s autonomy was somewhat limited because he shared the
lesson planning with a team of other teachers. However, this team had a great deal of autonomy to plan as they desired and perhaps teachers in similar situations could encourage their teammates to build in more flexibility. Ms. Lawrence had a greater amount of teacher autonomy since she often planned lessons separately from her grade-level teammates based on what she felt would work best for her particular students, which allowed her to incorporate whatever texts she and her students selected together. However, in schools and districts where teachers must use more scripted curricula or a prescribed list of approved texts, negotiating choices with students would be problematic if not impossible.

Secondly, teachers would need the support of school and district administrators to remain open to students’ choices for curriculum. As explained in chapter two, some of the pop-culture texts adolescents enjoy espouse language and values that clash with school-sanctioned language and values (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). The potential exists that administrators could prohibit such negotiations for fear that instruction would suffer or that students’ choices would be inappropriate in school settings.

Finally, teachers and students would need access to the types of resources that provide choices for curriculum. In the case of this study, the school had implemented a 1:1 laptop initiative, which provided laptop computers and internet connectivity for all students. Without similar resources, there would be additional limits to the kinds of choices students and teachers would have around curriculum.

**Protecting Students’ First Space Goals.**

In order for negotiation around the curriculum to be possible for students and teachers, certain circumstances for students must also be met. First, students must believe
that their first space goals are protected. This requires students to have a sustained belief in the following related ideas:

- My ideas and opinions are highly valuable to the teacher and the process.
- I will be able to assert my first space safely.
- I can trust the teacher to honor my first space goals.

Beyond these beliefs, students would also need scaffolding for student agency that includes the following: an understanding of the teacher’s second space goals, a streamlined process, skills needed to complete the steps, sufficient time for each step, and help imagining and practicing different sorts of roles.

**My ideas and opinions are highly valuable.** Based on evidence from iterations A and B, the first belief students would need in order to negotiate curriculum choices effectively with their teachers is that their ideas and opinions are highly valuable to the teacher and the process. During iteration A, the students did not appear comfortable taking on roles of authority, as evidenced by their need for approval from the researcher and teacher while finding and recommending informational texts. In addition, several students in iteration A indicated that their searches were conducted primarily with the teacher’s second space goals in mind. What resulted was the selection of a text that students did not find particularly interesting, as evidenced by their off-task behaviors whenever the text was reviewed or used.

As explained in the earlier findings, students may have had difficulty breaking out of their traditional roles of having to meet the teacher’s requirements rather than their own. Students, like their teacher, may have been locked into their previous understandings of how school works—essentially Friere’s (1986) model of banking—where students are mere
receptacles whose job is to meekly “permit themselves to be filled” (p. 71). The students’ inability to see themselves as having important ideas that were valuable to the teacher and the process may have limited them to trying to meet just another predetermined performance expectation of their teacher.

Changes to the classroom protocols for iteration B included emphasizing that students would be taking on new roles as expert consultants to their teacher. Although other factors may have also played a part, such as the differing ages and levels of experience of participants, this new emphasis may have helped students to believe that their own first space goals and ideas were indeed quite important. During iteration B, students did not seek their teacher’s approval for their choices and recommendations. Furthermore, the final choice of text that they negotiated with the teacher interested the students and resulted in a high level of student engagement while also meeting the curriculum goals of the teacher. Without the belief that their own ideas and opinions are highly valuable to the teacher and the process, students may not be able to effect changes to the curriculum that are truly beneficial for students.

I can assert my first space safely. The second belief required of students is that they will be able to assert their first space goals safely. During the study pilot and iteration A, students indicated having strong connections with certain types of informational texts. However, when students attempted to negotiate with their teacher openly in class, such as when Hannah argued for her article about the barnacle buck, their arguments met with teacher disapproval, which resulted in hurt feelings. In addition, some students appeared to lack the courage to assert their choices, possibly fearing a similar open rejection. For example, Gabe in iteration A indicated in his recommendation form that he cared greatly for
his text about fishing; however, he had not spoken up in class. Indeed few students offered any kind of negotiation on behalf of their selections during iteration A. Perhaps Gabe and other students did not feel safe enough to assert their first space choices openly, which may have led to five participants indicating that they had not been able to build a third space with their teacher.

What happened in iteration A seems to be more evidence that the students (and their teacher) were unable to imagine and enact new roles for themselves beyond those of the traditional banking system. In order to assert their first space goals with a sense of safety, students would need to be able to imagine themselves as having ideas equally worthy of assertion and negotiation as their teacher’s. Of course, this is predicated upon teachers also agreeing to these new roles for students.

During iteration B, the use of electronic media for students to negotiate their choices may have provided students a greater sense of safety when asserting their first space goals. With the exception of Brianna, all participants submitted comments for negotiation through the Google form Ms. A. provided. The use of electronic media allowed students to make comments without fear of sharing their first space goals and risking an open rejection from the teacher or peers. When asked about the process for negotiation, Ms. Lawrence responded, “I thought it worked great. I mean, I always like verbal discussions about things, but I think having them respond that way, I think they can be a little more honest when they believe that their co-student is not going to see their response” (interview response, January 13, 2014). The students in iteration B also indicated satisfaction with the process, as evidenced by every participant responding that the class had indeed successfully negotiated a
third space with their teacher. Doing so would have been difficult without students believing that they could safely assert their first space goals.

**I can trust the teacher to honor my first space.** The third belief required of students is that their teacher can be trusted to honor their first space goals. Just as it is important for students to feel they can assert their first space goals safely, it is also important that once the first space goals have been shared that the teacher will honor the students’ ideas and find ways to incorporate students’ contributions, even if only to learn more about what students need for engagement in the future.

One way teachers could honor students’ first space goals is by opening spaces in the curriculum that allow for greater flexibility. In iteration A, the second space goals for the text may have been defined so narrowly that students were unable to find a space for their own selections. As a result, the greater burden was on students to meet the teacher’s second space goals, especially for students whose first space goals were more divergent. The lesson plan for iteration B opened a somewhat larger space for students to find and recommend texts, which allowed Ms. Lawrence to honor their recommendations with a greater likelihood of being used in a future lesson.

Another way teachers could honor students’ first space goals is by respecting students’ selections even when they could not serve the teacher’s immediate teaching goals. For example, students in both Mr. Allen’s and Ms. Lawrence’s classes recommended texts that would have been difficult to incorporate in the prescribed lesson; however, rather than disregarding the texts, or discarding them as in the case of Gabrielle’s recommended text about shoes, the teachers could have considered how similar texts and topics would be useful in other lessons. For example, Gabrielle’s text containing photos and advertisements about
shoes could possibly serve in a future lesson on multimedia texts and persuasion, both of which are required topics in the new ELA standards.

In essence, students must believe that their teachers will listen and respond respectfully and thoughtfully when students share their opinions during negotiations. If the students believe that the teacher will ultimately disregard their recommendations, they will be less likely to put forth effort and take on the risks associated with negotiations. Therefore, the belief that their teacher will honor their first space goals is essential to students’ participation in meaningful negotiations about choices for curriculum.

**Scaffolding from teachers.** Although these student beliefs must in place, students will also need scaffolding from their teachers in order to assume student agency for curriculum change. Evidence from study iterations A and B demonstrated that the scaffolding should include the following: an understanding of the teacher’s second space goals, a streamlined process, skills needed to complete the steps, sufficient time for each step, and help imagining and practicing different sorts of roles.

First of all, students will need an understanding of their teacher’s second space goals. During iterations A and B, students expressed an appreciation for learning more about their teacher’s goals, including the types of texts the teacher would need to deliver a future lesson. Without understanding the teacher’s second space goals, students’ recommendations would not be as useful to the teacher, and therefore the teacher’s second space goals for student learning would not be protected.

Secondly, students will need a streamlined process for making curriculum recommendations. During iteration A, students were confused by the Lexile analyzer, which resulted in confusion and frustration. During iteration B, the process was simplified so that
students could find and recommend texts that they enjoyed more efficiently. By providing a streamlined process, students can select and recommend texts with confidence, and therefore focus greater energy on the more difficult aspects of the study, such as negotiating with the teacher and breaking out of traditional roles.

Third, students will need skills to complete the necessary steps. In this study, students needed to be able to conduct effective searches online, scan and read texts to find what interested them, receive and respond to their teachers’ emails, complete digital forms for recommending texts, form opinions and generate reasons why a certain text should or should not be used in class, and communicate verbally, in writing, and through electronic media to negotiate the final selections. Although this is not an exhaustive list of what skills students needed to complete each step, it demonstrates how if any one of the necessary skills were weak or absent, students would be unsuccessful in their negotiations.

Fourth, students will need sufficient time to complete each step. During iteration A, students did not have the time they needed to review and negotiate text selections, which may have resulted in a text selection that did not meet many students’ first space goals. During iteration B, the new protocols provided students with the time they needed, which led to greater student satisfaction in the process and more engaged reading during the lesson.

Finally, students will need their teacher’s help to understand and practice different sorts of roles in the classroom. In iteration A, Mr. Allen and I did mention at least once early on in the process with students that they would serve as consultants to their teacher. However, in iteration B, Ms. Lawrence and I emphasized this new role on multiple occasions throughout the study, in an effort to remind ourselves and students that they were assuming new roles as experts. This emphasis, along with the other structures provided for enacting
student agency, may have helped students to assume slightly different roles and to recommend and negotiate text selections with more confidence and success. By emphasizing often that students were assuming new roles, perhaps both students and teachers were reminded that they were “breaking the bank,” or at least moving slightly away from the system of banking in schools as described by Friere (1986), in small ways and for a short amount of time.

It is important to note that, while I have organized this section as if the circumstances for teachers and students are somehow separate sets of conditions, the exact opposite is true. In order for students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum, they must work together, communicate, and help each other learn to enact new roles in classrooms. If any one of the beliefs breaks down for teachers, then students cannot safely participate in the negotiations as needed to effect change. Similarly, if any one of the beliefs breaks down for students, then the beliefs of the teacher cannot override them and lead to a successful negotiation. Each set of beliefs, then, relies on messages received from the other. In this way, the process of negotiation will require communication, effort, and change on the part of both students and teachers in order to develop trust and reach the goal of third spaces for mutual learning. Although this is true, because the teacher retains the greater amount of authority in schools, the initial opening of third spaces lies more within the teacher’s responsibility to initiate change.

Summary

Throughout the study, participants had trouble breaking free from what Friere (1986) called the banking system of education in order to imagine and act upon a new way to select texts and share in decision-making about curriculum. Findings from study iterations A and B
suggested that there are two overarching sets of circumstances required for students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum. The first set of circumstances involve whether or not the teacher feels that his or her second space goals are protected. This requires that teachers believe the following: time spent negotiating with students is worthwhile, students can make responsible choices if well prepared, and students’ choices can serve the goals of the curriculum. In addition, teachers must have autonomy in lesson planning, supportive administrators, and sufficient school resources. The second set of circumstances required for negotiation of curriculum choices involves whether or not students feel that their first space goals are protected. This requires that students believe the following: their ideas and opinions are valuable to the teacher and the process, they will be able to assert their first spaces safely, and they can trust the teacher to honor their first space goals. Students also require their teachers to scaffold for student agency by providing them with an understanding of teachers’ second space goals, a streamlined process, skills needed to complete the steps, sufficient time to participate, and help imagining and practicing a different role than they have experienced in the traditional banking system of schools. Both sets of circumstances, those that protect the spaces of teachers and those that protect the spaces of students, are mutually influential and necessary for teachers and students to negotiate choices for curriculum and to break away from the banking system of education.

Summary of All Findings

The following section summarizes all findings in the study, as organized by each study iteration and the research questions.
Iteration A

How do high school students respond to their teacher’s request to find and recommend informational texts for use in a future lesson? The students responded with enthusiasm, which changed to confusion and hesitation when students did not know how to submit a text or when they wanted reassurance for their choices. Most students returned to enthusiasm once they submitted a text they liked. The one exception was Krisy, who never found a satisfying text. Overall, students reported that the informational texts they selected were different from what they usually read for school because the texts were interesting rather than boring and referred to information from the present day rather than the past.

What happens when students and teachers negotiate which informational texts will be studied? In what ways can students influence teachers’ selection of informational texts? The students had limited time, limited preparation, and limited impact on their teachers’ choices of informational texts. It appeared that the teacher and students experienced difficulty breaking out of their traditional roles where the teacher judged students’ work and the students accepted their teacher’s judgment.

How do choice and negotiation influence reading engagement of students around informational texts? The data suggested that student choice, not negotiation, was the key to engagement. There was little engagement during the ELA lesson, possibly because the text that was selected better represented the teacher’s second space goals rather than most of the students’ first space goals.

What are some barriers to student agency, and how can they be lessened or eliminated? The teacher and students in iteration A appeared to adhere to their traditional roles. The teacher expressed a need to stick closely to the curriculum set by him and his
teacher colleagues. Furthermore, the teacher believed that the negotiation process would have gone better had he been working with more motivated students.

**Adjustments between Iterations**

Based upon findings and recommendations of participants in iteration A, I adjusted the study protocols for iteration B as follows to attempt to lessen the barriers to student agency and better facilitate negotiations between the teacher and students. First, I stressed that students were taking on new roles as expert consultants to the teacher. Second, I supported the development of a lesson plan that was less restricted by a single theme or unit. Third, I streamlined the process for recommending texts by removing the Lexile level check. Fourth, I stressed the need to plan and protect the time allotted for each step of the process. Fifth, I asked that students have time in class to review the texts other students recommended. Finally, I arranged for students to use electronic media to communicate their negotiations with the teacher. Although these adjustments likely influenced the outcomes and findings for iteration B, they were also influenced by differences among participants and contexts. Therefore, it is difficult to know definitively whether the changes to protocols actually led to the different outcomes and findings for iteration B.

**Iteration B**

_How do high school students respond to their teacher’s request to find and recommend informational texts for use in a future lesson?_ The students in iteration B responded with enthusiasm and confidence, with the exception of Brianna, who had needed more time to find an informational text to recommend. The students reported that their selections were more interesting, relevant, and open than the texts they were usually assigned to read.
What happens when students and teachers negotiate which informational texts will be studied? In what ways can students influence teachers’ selection of informational texts? The data suggested that the students in iteration B were better prepared, more comfortable, more satisfied with the process for negotiation. The teacher and students demonstrated more relaxed interactions than usual during negotiations, suggesting that they may have temporarily broken away from traditional roles.

How do choice and negotiation influence reading engagement of students around informational texts? As in iteration A, student choice rather than negotiation appeared to be the key to reading engagement. Unlike in iteration A, students demonstrated many indicators of engagement during the ELA lesson using the negotiated text, possibly because the text met most students’ first space goals.

What are some barriers to student agency, and how can they be lessened or eliminated? The new protocols may have helped to lessen barriers to student agency, including adherence to traditional roles and overly restrictive lesson plans. However, time constraints and the teacher’s role as the final authority remained as barriers to student agency.

Primary Research Question

What set of circumstances would allow students and teachers to negotiate choices for curriculum? The findings from iterations A and B suggest that in order to break away from traditional roles and to be able to negotiate choices for curriculum, both teachers and students would require circumstances that protect their respective goals.

To feel that their second space goals are protected, teachers must believe that the time spent negotiating choices with students is time well spent, that students can make responsible
choices as long as they are well prepared, and that students’ choices can be used to serve the goals of the curriculum. Teachers also need certain external circumstances in place that support teacher agency, including teacher autonomy in lesson planning, the support of school and district administrators, and sufficient school resources.

To feel that their first space goals are protected, students must believe that their ideas and opinions are highly valuable to the teacher and the process, that they can assert their first space safely, and that they can trust the teacher to honor their first space goals. Students also need their teacher’s support in order to exercise new forms of student agency, including an understanding of the teacher’s second space goals, a streamlined process, skills needed to complete the steps, sufficient time for each step, and help imagining and practicing different sorts of roles in the classroom.

In the next chapter, I discuss the findings and what they suggest with regard to Third Space Theory, adolescents’ reading engagement with informational texts, issues of agency, and implications for classroom instruction and research.
CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I reflect on the study and how the findings relate to topics addressed in the review of literature. I begin with how Third Space Theory played out as a framework for the study and suggest a different conceptualization that acknowledges an additional second space of authority external to the classroom interactions between teacher and students. Afterward, I discuss informational texts and what students’ recommendations revealed about their preferences in comparison to texts typically used in school and in ELA classrooms. I then consider what the study revealed about reading engagement around informational texts and what circumstances tended to contribute or detract from reading engagement for the student participants. Next, I discuss issues of teacher and student agency in the study, and how differences between the participants may have played a part in their moves as agents. At the end of this chapter, I describe the implications and limitations of the study, present suggestions for future research, and consider how teachers and students can move farther toward shared spaces for curriculum decisions.

Third Space Theory Application

In this section, I discuss how I applied Third Space Theory to facilitate the opening of third spaces for literacy learning. Additionally, I offer a different conceptualization of what actually happened in the study, which I describe as providing points of entry for first spaces.
Finally, I discuss the implications of what the study suggests are challenges for opening third spaces around choices for curriculum.

**Manipulating Third Spaces for Literacy Learning**

As noted in the literature review, Third Space Theory was originally conceived by Bhabha (1994) as a production site for establishing hybrid spaces for collaboration and contestation. When applying the theory to classrooms, teachers comprise the second space of authority and students comprise the first spaces of those subject to authority. Some students in the study, particularly those with low- and mid-range attitudes toward reading, reported disliking the texts their teachers typically assigned, but they were forced to deal with the second space limitations placed on them. Consider Taco’s comment on the reading attitude survey that, “In school i don’t think I have a choice about reading, because if I don’t then I will not do well on a test or a paper” (November 13, 2013). So although students would have preferred to select more interesting texts to read for themselves, they were forced to read what their teachers assigned to them; otherwise they risked performing poorly on tests or papers.

Recognizing adolescent readers’ negative attitudes toward assigned reading, literacy researchers have repurposed Third Space Theory to consider how circumstances can be manipulated in classrooms to promote third spaces for literacy learning (Moje et al., 2004; Wiseman, 2011). According to this different conception of Third Space Theory, researchers and teachers initiate work with students to find third spaces that may challenge and reshape the literacy practices of both schools and students, to expand what schools deem valid forms of literacy and students’ skills and understandings around multiple forms of literacy. This repurposed use of Third Space Theory related well to this study, since the teachers
collaborated with me to initiate production work with students. As a result of the classroom procedures, both students and teachers were challenged by the process to rethink what types of informational texts could work in ELA classrooms for literacy learning. For example, consider the following statements from students and teachers during the closing interviews indicating that their views of what had to happen in school around text selection were challenged:

JayGhost: If they get a student’s opinion and they put it in the lesson plan, it could help the teacher as in learning a lot, like helping teach [the teacher]. (interview response, November 26, 2013)

Buck: I learned that not all the time the teacher makes the plans, that sometimes kids can help too. (interview response, December 20, 2013)

Brianna: [I learned] that the teacher’s not the only one who could find something good to read. (interview response, December 20, 2013)

Mr. Allen: I guess I was surprised about…just different things they were interested in, and how interested they were in some topics. I was surprised at the results that I got from students. (interview response, December 19, 2013)

Ms. Lawrence: It certainly encouraged me to make sure that I get their input. And we were able to find a great article that fit with what we were doing, and that also fit with what they needed to know in terms of how to analyze. (interview response, January 13, 2014)

Based upon these comments, the students learned that they could actually help their teachers learn, plan lessons, and select readings. The teachers learned that their students may have strong interests and important input that the teachers could incorporate in ways that support their teaching goals. So although the students and teachers did not initiate the production of third spaces around informational texts, the study did allow both students and teachers to reconsider how making shared decisions about curriculum could work differently than
traditional methods for text selection. The study perhaps opened at least a small space for viewing new possibilities for positioning teachers less as authority figures over students and more as collaborators with students. Indeed, students indicated in their feedback forms and interviews that they appreciated the “little bit of freedom” (Hannah, interview response, November 26, 2013) and would like more opportunities to contribute to their teachers’ decisions about curriculum. Furthermore, the teachers, particularly Ms. Lawrence, indicated that they were surprised by the positive results.

A potential concern for using Third Space Theory was that it would be applied in such a way that teachers claimed even more dominance over the space of classrooms by lessening students’ resistance to their authority. In the case of this study, students sometimes resisted reading teacher-selected informational texts during the teachers’ ELA lessons, as evidenced by my initial observations where students demonstrated unengaged behaviors around the Declaration of Independence and the King of England’s response. A goal of this study was to find informational texts that would better interest students and result in greater reading engagement around classroom lessons and texts. Although the greater level of reading engagement on behalf of students had the potential to lessen students’ resistance to the subsequent ELA lesson, the process of shared agency challenged teachers as much as it did students. Although the students felt pressure to recommend texts that would fit into their teachers’ second spaces, the teachers also felt pressure to find ways to use the students’ recommended texts. Certainly, as Mr. Allen and Ms. Lawrence commented, it would have been easier for them to simply teach another lesson with one of their own texts rather than to find ways to incorporate the students’ selections. Therefore, any new space that actually
opened during the study challenged the teachers as much as it challenged students, and resulted in mutual learning, perhaps a first step toward third space.

A Conceptualization of Shared Spaces in This Study

After considering how shared spaces actually played out in the study, I recognize that Third Space Theory, at least as I had initially conceptualized it, did not describe well what actually happened when students and teachers participated in my study. The following figure (Figure 1) illustrates how I initially viewed Third Space Theory as the framework of the study and how I introduced the concept to participants.

**Figure 1. Conceptualization of Third Space Theory**

In the initial conceptualization of third spaces, the work involved teachers and students learning about each other’s goals and interests and exploring where their first and second spaces could overlap, at least with regard to informational texts. Although this was useful for framing the study, it did not accurately represent the mechanisms, boundaries, and challenges during the study. For example, in this initial conception, the first and second spaces are afforded equal area, as if students and teachers had equal spaces for acting as agents. Yet that was not the case in the study since the teacher space was afforded much more space and privilege in the context of curriculum decision making.
Secondly, both spaces seem equally capable of moving toward the other in this initial conceptualization. However, the level of agency for students and teachers was far from equal, with teacher agency trumping student agency at multiple points. The study, as well as literature on student agency, demonstrated that students have difficulty enacting new forms of agency without their teachers’ support. Therefore, at least in this study, students could only bring in their first space goals into play if teachers allowed them to. So the real challenge was not so much for students and teachers to explore where their spaces could overlap; instead, the challenge was for teachers to make openings in their second spaces that could incorporate more of the students’ first spaces.

Another challenge to my original conception of the theory was representing an additional space of authority that was acting upon shared spaces of classrooms. Although I represented second space in this study as being the space of the teacher, there was actually another source of authority in the larger context acting upon both students and teachers. This additional second space of authority involved external policies and restrictions enforced upon students and teachers within classrooms, which included the curriculum standards, school policies, district policies, and state and federal policies that governed what should or should not happen in classrooms. In my original conception, there was nothing to indicate that teachers and students were not completely free to act and make changes to power structures and expectations in classrooms. However, during the study, I noted several occasions when the participating teachers felt pressure from external sources to stay on track in the planned curriculum or to prepare for high-stakes assessments. For example, when Mr. Allen expressed a need to use the same informational text as his teacher colleagues, he was fulfilling a requirement for shared planning at his grade level in support of a school initiative.
As another example, Ms. Lawrence expressed concern about whether or not students would be able to find an informational text that supported their preparation for the state exam. Clearly, an external second space existed that imposed additional authority over the teachers and students.

With these understandings to inform it, the following figure (Figure 2) is a conceptualization of what actually happened in the study as teachers and students sought a shared space around the selection of informational texts.

**Figure 2. Conceptualization of Shared Spaces—Points of Entry**

This conceptualization depicts a different relationship between the first spaces of students and the second spaces of teachers. First of all, the second space of the teacher commands a much larger space in the figure. This represents the greater privilege of the teacher’s second space when compared to students’. Secondly, there are multiple first spaces represented by different small shapes. This acknowledges the complexity of shared classroom spaces since classrooms contain not just one kind of first space working with one similar goal, but with as many first spaces and goals as there are students. Indeed, the student participants in the study had widely varying interests, all of which claimed a different space within the culture of the
classroom. The small square inside the teacher’s larger square represents those students whose first spaces more closely resembled that of their teachers. For this study, that square represented those students with high-range reading attitudes whose reading preferences better matched those of their teachers. These students may be perceived by their teachers as more motivated. In comparison, the circle and triangle represent those students in the margins of the classroom reading culture, such as the students with mid-range and low-range reading attitudes who were less likely to find a space within the classroom for their particular reading interests such as fashion, fishing, or hunting. In addition, the figure depicts openings in the second space of teachers through which students can enter. I call this conceptualization “points of entry.”

The “points of entry” model better represents what happened between the teachers and students in this study. First of all, the teachers described to students their second space goals for the lesson. The description opened a “point of entry” for students and gave them a target to aim for when seeking texts that met their own interests but could also be acceptable to the teacher. Once students found a text, they recommended it to their teacher. Whether or not the text, and the first space it represented, could enter the second space of the lesson depended upon the teacher and their willingness and ability to open a large enough point of entry. Some students would have no trouble entering the second space with their texts, since their goals more closely resembled those of their teacher. For example, Melody reported on the reading survey “…so far I’ve liked all the books I’ve read in school” (survey response, November 13, 2013). Indeed, she experienced little difficulty in finding the text about unjustly convicted Black men that both she and Mr. Allen liked for the lesson. For students whose first space goals were more divergent, the ability to contribute a text that represented
their first spaces was less likely. In iteration A, the point of entry for students was rather
narrow, since the texts needed to relate to themes of racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In
iteration B, the point of entry was slightly larger, since students could connect their texts to
any theme from the semester. Through negotiation, students were able to review other
students’ recommended texts, particularly in iteration B when they were given time in class,
and possibly guide the teacher choose a text that appealed to many of the students’ first space
goals. If such a text were found, it could potentially draw more students into the second
space during the lesson through a mutually interesting and useful text.

Finally, to represent the space of authority external to the classroom space, I added a
larger oval that encompassed the first and second spaces of the teacher and students. This
oval is formed by a perforated line, representing how teachers and students move in and out
of the space of school authority as they enter and exit classrooms and school spaces. The
larger oval then represents an ever-present source of authority over what happened in
classrooms for the study, such as when Mr. Allen felt the need to keep pace with his teacher
teammates, or when Ms. Lawrence sought a text that could help to prepare students for their
state exam. Both students and teachers were thus limited in their choices for curriculum by
this source of external authority. It is important to note that during the study, I occupied this
external space of authority, both as a researcher guiding the procedures in the study and as a
representative of district-level leadership.

**Informational Texts and Students’ Recommendations**

Although the literature on adolescent readers and informational texts suggests that
adolescents dislike informational texts because they find them to be uninteresting (Fordham,
Wellman, & Sandmann, 2002; Guthrie & Klauda, 2012), most participants in this study had
little trouble finding informational texts that they found personally appealing during their searches online. However, the challenge may instead lie in how students’ preferred texts differ from those typically used in ELA classrooms. In this section, I first consider how texts students recommended differed from typical school texts. I also discuss the evidence that students and teachers associated reading with the types of reading privileged in school settings. Finally, I discuss how the texts students recommended may create challenges for ELA teachers who may prefer to use more traditional texts from the literary canon.

**Students’ Recommended Texts vs. Typical School Texts**

One of the interesting aspects of the study was to learn what types of informational texts the students would be attracted to, and how their choices would perhaps test the boundaries of what was acceptable or valid for study in class. In the two iterations for this study the students’ text selections touched on fairly unsurprising topics and generally reflected the literature about the types of texts adolescents prefer. According to the literature, adolescents prefer to read about celebrities, musicians, pop-culture, sports, and people like themselves (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Pitcher et al., 2007; Warrican, 2006). The students in this study recommended largely similar topics, including texts about celebrities, pop-culture, fashion, sports, and current events. There were also recommendations that reflected more individualized interests, such as horses, ghosts, space travel, and autism. Only one student, Krisy in iteration A, reported having trouble finding a text that interested her.

When asked how the texts they recommended were different from what they would normally read for school, many students indicated that they felt a greater sense of enjoyment
or interest in their own selections. Consider the following comments that demonstrate this point:

Hannah: Because its something i love and like (form submission, November 15, 2013)

Smoke: You talk about boring things in school and this is something fun to learn about. (form submission, November 20, 2013)

Tibi: This text actually catches my attention unlike most of the texts i have to read for school. (form submission, December 17, 2013)

Indeed, most of the student participants reported that the texts they typically read for school were boring. The word “boring” was used by students in reference to school reading 31 times in the data. Other descriptors that came up were old, stale, and lame. The idea that school texts were boring was pervasive among the student participants, except for Melody, who had one of the highest reading attitude ratings in the study at 115. Consider this comment from Melody:

Reading for me is one of the best things. Whether it is an article or book, it’s just nice to do. You can expand your vocabulary and knowledge, and for me, find out more on world events that’re happening right now and be able to talk about them in detail. I feel the same way about reading for school, so far I’ve liked all the books I’ve read in school. (survey response, November 13, 2013)

Her comment demonstrates that she actually enjoyed the texts assigned in school. However, even Melody realized that her feelings about reading in school were not typical among her peers. When asked if she would like to be involved in helping her teachers design lessons in the future, she answered, “Yes. I can have more of a say in the class, and try to make it to where the kids like it more, because a lot of the time they’re just sleeping and hating it” (interview response, November 26, 2013).
Students also reported that their recommended texts were different because they referred to topics not usually addressed in school. Consider the following comments from both iterations on students’ form submissions:

- Xochitl: We don’t talk about rape. (November 14, 2013)
- Melody: It talks about [racism] in real talk instead of trying to make it sound better then it actually does. (November 15, 2013)
- Carl: This article [about segregation today’s public schools] is different because we usually don't talk about segregation in class. (December 17, 2013)
- Marie: This text is different from what we normally read because it's about racism, but it is more open. (December 17, 2013)
- Buck: In school we never talk about hunting or fishing. (December 16, 2013)
- Gabrielle: [The text about celebrity makeup malfunctions is] different because in school we have to read things that are "school appropriate" (December 17, 2013)

Based on their comments, students seemed to recognize that there were some topics deemed inappropriate for school settings, such as hunting or makeup, which may be viewed as unimportant in school, or more serious topics such as rape or racism, which may be taboo when discussed more openly or in relation to current contexts. Interestingly, Buck, a White male participant in iteration B, commented in his interview that reading the article about the n-word in class would have been “weird for a teacher to bring up when we should be the ones kind of talking about it I guess” (interview response, December 19, 2013). He explained that, “‘Cause, like our class members, we’re pretty comfortable with each other, and we’re willing to talk about it more.” Buck and his classmates seemed to understand that there were
some subjects that students found relevant and important that perhaps teachers would not, or could not, choose to present to students themselves.

Students also reported that what they recommended to read was more recent, whereas what was typically taught in schools was about the past. Consider the following comments that supported this view:

Jessica: Well we really don’t read this kind of things we learn more in history about this but it was like in the past. But nothing that it's present now. (form submission, November 15, 2013)

LeAnn: it different because it based on something that is happening in present time (form submission, November 15, 2013)

Xochitl: we usually don’t read about sports, or music, or animals; we usually talk about old stuff like wars and…all of that. (interview response, November 19, 2013)

The students’ connections to texts appear to be based on personal relevance and timeliness. Few could argue that many of the readings in school are from the distant past. The students in this study seemed to crave readings about topics they saw as more relevant to today and to their current lives.

Perhaps, as is supported in the literature, when students report having negative feelings about reading, they are responding based on how they feel about reading at school, rather than how they feel about reading for their own purposes (Knoester, 2009; Hopper, 2005). Although in the study most student participants had negative views of reading for school, all participants reported an interest in something that could compel them to read. Consider Gabe and Buck, for example, two students with the lowest reading attitudes in their respective iterations; they found texts on fishing and hunting that they demonstrated having strong interest in reading. Furthermore, all students demonstrated the indicators for reading
engagement in class at least at some point over the course of the study, such as when they were allowed to research a topic of interest, or as they were reading through some high-interest texts their classmates recommended. My findings in the study, then, support the literature about adolescent readers that suggests that adolescents who claim to dislike reading actually can become engaged in reading when the reading material is about topics with personal interest and relevance (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008; Alvermann et al., 2004).

**Associations of Reading with Fiction and School**

There is some evidence in the study to support the literature that says students associate “reading” with reading fiction and books, and that this type of reading may be privileged by schools (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Moje et al. 2008). Based on comments on the reading survey, students with high-range attitudes preferred fiction and novels. Perhaps their more positive attitudes toward reading resulted in part because their preferences for fiction better reflect the types of reading people and schools generally associate with being readers. The teachers also appeared to associate reading with fiction, which they themselves may have preferred. Mr. Allen commented once to students before distributing copies of the informational text they had selected:

We’re going to be getting away from reading for a little while…in terms of reading books. Next week we’re going to start *Romeo and Juliet*. So we need to be prepared for that. But in the meantime, before we get there, we’ve got to get through this. (fieldnotes, December 5, 2013)

His comment suggested that he associated reading with reading fiction, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but that he caught his error and corrected it. His subsequent comment indicated that he viewed the lesson on informational texts as something they had “to get through” to get to the fiction, something he may enjoy more, or something
that was closer to his own goals for teaching. Ms. Lawrence similarly indicated that she associated reading with reading fiction. During my initial interview with her when I asked how she planned what texts her students would read for a lesson, she explained that she had “let go of a lot of reading because we have to focus more on—I’ve let go of a lot of fiction because you have to focus more on informational text” (December 13, 2013). Similar to Mr. Allen’s comment, Ms. Lawrence indicated that she associated reading with fiction but caught her own error and corrected it. The comment also demonstrated that she may have a preference for reading fiction since it was something she had to “let go of” due to new requirements of the teaching standards.

The association between reading and fiction may lead some students to either embrace identities as readers or reject them, depending on how closely their reading interests fit what is considered valid or acceptable reading at school. Perhaps the high-range readers have more positive attitudes toward reading because their preferred types of reading are the same as those most often associated with school reading and being a reader. On the other hand, perhaps the low- and mid-range readers have mixed feelings about reading because what qualifies as “reading” in school does not meet their own needs and interests for reading as well or as often.

**Teacher Attraction to the Traditional Literary Canon**

This study, and so much of the literature on adolescent literacy, suggests that adolescent readers could develop more positive attitudes toward reading and become more engaged in reading if allowed to read the types of texts they find personally meaningful. If this is such a common finding, it begs the question of why ELA teachers would not offer more such reading choices for students. The answer may be somewhat based in tradition and
somewhat based in the required curriculum. Some of the research on teacher education
indicates that teachers tend to teach in the way they were taught themselves, even if they
believe that other methods are more effective (Britzman, 1991; Kennedy 1999). In light of
their past experiences as students, it may be difficult for some ELA teachers to imagine
teaching from texts other than the traditional ones that were used when they themselves were
students. Furthermore, ELA teachers may enjoy the canonical texts. Mr. Allen commented
in his initial interview that, when selecting texts for students, he would “always try to put
myself in their place and what they would like. Of course, I would just about do anything
just because I always liked English class, so I would just always do it” (interview response,
November 4, 2013). As is true of myself and probably other teachers who chose to teach
ELA, Mr. Allen was attracted to teaching ELA because he himself enjoyed the traditional
readings as a student. It may be hard for some ELA teachers to imagine not liking
Shakespeare or Steinbeck. So tradition, as well as the enjoyment of traditional literature,
likely plays a part in ELA teachers’ decisions to teach from the types of texts they do.

Certainly, however, the required curriculum and expectations of others influence the
decision as well. A look at the Common Core State Standards for ELA Appendix B text
exemplars would demonstrate that little listed there resembles what the students
recommended. In fact, the Common Core text exemplars very much represent the traditional
canon of literature. The list includes informational texts, but they are mainly landmark texts
from central turning points in American history, such as the “Gettysburg Address” and
Richard Wright’s Black Boy. Although the standards themselves do not stipulate that
teachers have to use any of the exemplar texts, teachers may feel pressure to teach from them
since parents, school administrators, and fellow ELA teachers will likely expect to see these
types of texts being used in ELA classrooms. If Mr. Allen and Ms. Lawrence wanted to
include more of the texts students recommended, they would likely feel some pressure to use
traditional ELA materials much of the time. The pressure for Mr. Allen as a younger and
newer ELA teacher may be even greater. More about this will be discussed later with regard
to teacher agency for beginning teachers.

**Reading Engagement**

In this section of the discussion, I consider the overwhelming evidence from the study
that supports the importance of student interest for engagement in reading. I also discuss
how reader-centered text selection, rather than curriculum-centered text selection, may
enhance reading engagement for students. Finally, I discuss the power of online multimedia
texts for reading engagement, but also the challenges they may present for teachers related to
their usefulness in ELA lessons.

**Interest Makes All the Difference**

Throughout the study, students explained that reading something they found
personally interesting was the difference between reading engagement and disengagement.
My observations of students’ interactions around texts also supported this connection
between personal interest and reading engagement. In iteration A, students appeared deeply
engaged when conducting research about a person of choice, but they appeared disengaged
when reading the teacher-selected text about the King of England’s response to the
Declaration of Independence. In iteration B, students appeared deeply engaged when they
were assigned to read the text about the n-word, but they were largely disengaged when they
were assigned to read the Declaration of Independence. This would suggest that students had
the potential to be engaged readers, but that the text itself and whether they found it
personally interesting is what made the difference for them as readers. This would appear to be a powerful key to motivating students to read texts in the classroom. Melody captured this idea during our interview when she said, “It all goes back to the interest thing, because some of them will pay attention more and learn more about it if they like it” (November 26, 2013).

Although students gave clear and consistent messages that their reading engagement depended upon the text, the teachers indicated concerns about students’ levels of motivation, as explained earlier in the findings. Indeed a few students reported that they would read simply because it was assigned in school even though they did not like it. For example, consider the following comments from students’ surveys to support this idea:

- **Buck:** I don’t like to read, but I will read if I have to. Like for school that is not a problem. (December 16, 2013)
- **La’shay:** I read when have, like for a teacher or something. (December 16, 2013)
- **Marie:** Most of the time I only read when it’s required in school. (December 16, 2013)
- **Allinson:** When I have to read for school I read the book. (December 16, 2013)
- **Lusia:** I only read at school when teachers tell me to or when we reading a book (November 13, 2013)

As this shows, some students would read simply because their teacher assigned it, which indicated an external motivation to read. When the teacher participants talked about having more motivated students, they may have been referring to these types of students who would read simply because it was required. Such students create fewer challenges for teachers when making decisions about what texts to teach. But evidence in the study indicated that
many student participants would not read simply because the teacher assigned it. Instead, they needed to have a personal interest in the text to engage in reading.

**Reader-Centered Text Selection and Engagement**

As explained in the previous section, teachers may be influenced to select readings for students based on their own personal enjoyment, tradition, guidance from the curriculum, and recommendations of other professionals. These methods of selection tend to be curriculum-centered rather than student-centered. In other words, teachers decide what texts are most valuable for teaching the curriculum and then seek ways to engage students in the texts as they are taught. The results in this study suggest that a more powerful way to choose texts would be a reader-centered approach. A reader-centered approach to text selection would require first a consideration of students’ first space interests. Whenever possible, teachers could include elements of student choice, such as when Mr. Allen and Ms. Lawrence allowed students to research a topic of their choice. However, when texts need to be used for whole-group instruction, this becomes more difficult since students have differing interests. A process for text selection and negotiation, such as the one used in this study, could provide a way to select more engaging texts for use with whole groups. In this way, the study filled a gap in the literature regarding text selection and choice for whole-group instruction. The study also introduced a new way of leveraging student choice within the regular classroom context, something rarely illustrated in previous studies. It demonstrated how, through negotiation and increased mutual understanding, adolescents’ preferred texts can be incorporated in regular classrooms in ways that meet the students’ needs for more engaging texts while also meeting the teacher’s curriculum goals. Indeed, when the teacher and students in iteration B studied the text they selected together, the
resulting high level of engagement illustrated how this could work successfully since both the teachers and students appeared to have their needs met through this more reader-centered approach to text selection.

One concern that may impede reader-centered text selection is the issue of time. As explained in the findings for iterations A and B, teachers were always cognizant that they had a limited time frame within which to cover the curriculum and meet all of their learning goals with students. Overall, the process of text selection and negotiation for this study took approximately three hours of class time to complete. That included time for students to learn about the task, search for texts, review other texts, recommend changes to the teacher, and then learn what their teacher ultimately selected. That does not even include the additional time it took for the teacher to review all of the texts during his or her planning time at school or at home. Teachers may have a hard time justifying losing this kind of class time and planning time when, as Ms. Lawrence explained, they already has their own selected texts “printed and copied and ready to go” (interview response, January 13, 2014).

However, I would argue that the time spent negotiating around text selections would be a more efficient use of class time than it first appears when compared to curriculum-centered text selection practices. During my observations of student engagement, although teachers may have felt like their time was well-spent for instruction around the Declaration of Independence or the King of England’s fabricated response, these were large periods of time during which students were not closely attending to the texts or to what the teacher was saying. In comparison, when students were searching for their own texts of interest or reviewing other students’ reading selections as part of the study procedures, they did appear to be engaged in reading. Students’ comments indicated that they wanted more opportunities
to select the texts they studied. Furthermore, in the case of iteration B, the negotiation of the text selection seemed to pay off when all students appeared to be deeply engaged in the reading and the subsequent classroom discussion.

After their participation in the study, both Mr. Allen and Ms. Lawrence indicated in their final interviews that they found the student-centered procedures for text-selection to be useful for student engagement, and that they were interested in doing similar types of reader-centered text selection in the future. Mr. Allen commented that he would incorporate more of the students’ selections for the remainder of the semester. He also explained, “I just think it’s a good thing to try new practices and tactics, and include the students as much possible in your decision making process, because ultimately it’s all about them” (December 13, 2013). Ms. Lawrence also indicated that she saw value in the process. When asked what she learned from the experience, she answered, “That I need to ask them for their input. That I need to say…do the exact same thing--set up a Symbaloo, and say I need us to read an article…I’ve set up some sites; go find an article that you want to post for the class to read.” She added, “Again, for somebody like Buck who’s not a reader to say, yeah I went home and I read that article. That was fabulous…it certainly encouraged me to make sure that I get their input” (January 13, 2014). Perhaps increasing the use of student-centered selection practices would demonstrate that the problems for reading engagement lie not with having the wrong students but with using the wrong texts.

**Opening Up to the Power of Online Multimedia Texts**

As the literature demonstrates, the use of online multimedia texts can be a powerful resource for engaging adolescents in reading (Alvermann et al., 2004; Benson, 2010; Schofield & Rogers, 2004). Student participants in this study also demonstrated high levels
of engagement when looking at texts online when compared to other types of reading in class. Although it was difficult to distinguish whether or not engagement was the result of using technology, having access to multimedia, or having the added element of student choice, the internet did provide an unlimited array of reading options for students. By allowing students to search for texts they found interesting online, most students were able to find something they wanted to read.

Based on findings for iterations B, the element of choice and students’ ability to find something that interested them was the primary key to engagement, rather than just the appeal of multimedia itself. Recall that the students in iteration B were engaged in reading the text they had recommended during the ELA lesson even though it was printed on copy paper without any pictures or other elements inherent to multimedia texts. This suggests that a primary power of online environments for reading is that there are many more texts to choose from, thereby increasing the likelihood that students can find something personally interesting and meaningful. Because the high school where this study was conducted had 1:1 laptop environment for learning, this resource was readily available. Thinking of the three differences students noted in the texts they found versus what was traditionally assigned for reading in school--interest, timeliness, and non-traditional topics--the Internet searches gave students access to a wide variety texts that had these more appealing values.

The literature on adolescents and multimedia warned that there would be challenges to incorporating the kinds of texts adolescents preferred, since some of these texts could contain language, images, themes, or values that clashed with traditional notions of propriety within school settings (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). Such issues within this study may have been lessened by the classroom procedures, which led participants to
understand that they were selecting texts for a future ELA lesson. Because their teachers had given them some information about what would serve the lesson best and students knew that I and the teacher would review their selections, students may have tempered their choices to fit within more traditional notions of what was acceptable for school. However, there were some conflicts between students’ selections and teacher’s requirements for texts when students recommended texts that clearly did not fit within the lesson as requested by the teacher. For example, when students recommended texts about hunting and fishing, there was little the students could do to connect the texts with what their teacher needed for the ELA study. In addition, when Gabrielle submitted a text about shoes that was comprised mostly of pictures, Ms. Lawrence deleted the text. So the conflict between the texts students recommended and what their teachers approved had less to do with offensive language, images, or values, and more to do with expectations about what qualities made the texts useful for the lesson. In order for more of the student selected texts to work within ELA classrooms, teachers would have to consider ways these non-traditional texts could be used for teaching within the curriculum.

**Issues of Agency**

In this section, I discuss various issues that arose during the study around teacher and student agency. I begin by considering how differences between participants in iteration A and iteration B may have affected their differing abilities to enact new forms of classroom agency. I then discuss how often teacher agency took priority, essentially trumping student agency. However, I also consider how teacher agency is exercised on behalf of students and is even necessary for supporting student agency. Although student agency was rather limited in the study, I consider how the study at least allowed participants to imagine new forms of
student agency and gain new understandings, which are positive steps toward increasing student agency in the future.

**Teacher Agency and Levels of Experience**

As the teacher participants attempted to provide opportunities for student agency, the teachers’ relative levels of experience may have influenced outcomes. Mr. Allen, the teacher participant in iteration A, had only one year and few months of teaching experience when the study began. This likely affected his sense of control over how his students experienced the study. The literature on inexperienced teachers suggests that they have concerns about their relationships with colleagues, about teaching the curriculum properly, and about their ability to make autonomous decisions (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005; Melnick & Meister, 2008). These types of concerns may have limited Mr. Allen’s sense of his own agency to open new spaces for students. For example, Mr. Allen indicated that he could not use the students’ selected text for the ELA lesson instruction because he needed to teach the text his colleagues from his grade-level PLC were using. He may have felt less empowered to recommend to the other ELA teachers that they use the text his students recommended instead. In addition, Mr. Allen indicated that he needed to move on to the next teaching unit quickly since he kept pace with his grade-level colleagues. Although keeping pace with his colleagues was a requirement from an external second space of authority, it may have also served as a sense of security for Mr. Allen. In his interview, he explained,

> So it’s not so much what I’ve decided so much as what we decide together as a team, and I’ve found that that’s another great thing that helps me out, that we know in all the classes what’s going on, and that is such a big help to me that I don’t feel so alone and sort of thrown out there on my own. (November 4, 2013).
As a less experienced teacher, Mr. Allen may have felt uncomfortable straying from what his PLC colleagues recommended in order to incorporate the students’ selected texts. This close connection to shared planning with his colleagues, while serving as an important and positive source of support for Mr. Allen, may have complicated his ability to open second space requirements for text selections beyond the themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, it should also be noted that I did not emphasize the need to create a more open lesson space for students’ text selection until iteration B.

In comparison, as a more experienced teacher, Ms. Lawrence may have felt a greater sense of teacher agency in making the kinds of decisions that would allow students a bit more latitude in their text selections and in her lesson pacing. Ms. Lawrence was in her fourth year of teaching. In addition, she had many more years of work experience as a lawyer to bolster her sense of agency. Although Ms. Lawrence worked closely with her grade-level colleagues, they made independent decisions to teach units and lessons differently based upon the needs of their students. For example, Ms. Lawrence chose not to teach *The Crucible* to her students as did the other teachers at her grade level, because she felt that it “would be beyond what they would enjoy or could understand in the right amount of time period that I had to give it” (December 13, 2013). Clearly Ms. Lawrence felt a sense of her own agency as a teacher when making decisions on behalf of students. This additional level of autonomy may also have allowed her to incorporate the students’ text selection without as much worry that it would disrupt her ability to stay on track with other teachers.

As mentioned in chapter three, it is also important to remember that teacher agency was influenced by my positionality as a district leader for curriculum and instruction. Although I consider here how effectively teachers were able to act as agents for decision-
making around curriculum, I must acknowledge that much of what teachers did was directed by me for the purposes of the study. Therefore, the power structures were even more complex since as teachers navigated requirements of the curriculum, requirements of school administrators, expectations of their colleagues, and the needs of their students, they also had to incorporate the requirements of the study conducted by me, a district official. Although this is true for most studies in classrooms when a researcher guides a study in collaboration with teachers, my positionality as a district leader may have limited teacher agency even more than is typical.

**Student Agency and Age Differences**

Other differences that may have influenced the levels of agency during the study were the students’ ages. In iteration A, students were in the ninth grade and mostly 14 or 15 years old. In iteration B, students were in the eleventh grade and mostly 16 to 17 years old. Some literature on student agency suggests that older students may be more capable of claiming agency for themselves (Biddulph, 2011; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). Rudduck and Fielding (2006), who reviewed studies on student agency involving various ages of students, found that younger students seemed worried that criticizing their teachers would seem rude or wrong. Biddulph (2011), who worked with students in grades nine, ten, and twelve, found that the older students in their study were more confident in their conversations with adults than the younger students, but that younger students tended to rely more on “positive relationships with their teachers to participate in conversations” (Biddulph, 2011, p. 390). These differences between older and younger students were supported in this study when the younger students in iteration A asked for reassurance from me and their teacher for their text selections, whereas the older students did not ask for reassurance and seemed more confident.
in their recommendations. Furthermore, most students in iteration A seemed to accept their teachers’ evaluations of their selections and reasoning without question or need for further negotiation. In comparison, the older students in iteration B did not hesitate to offer their feedback during the negotiations. However, the circumstances were different in iteration B since students could provide their feedback using electronic forms of communication. Indeed research on adolescents and their use of the Internet suggests that adolescents are comfortable exploring new roles and identities through electronic media (Gross, 2004; Turkle, 1995). As a result, this format used in iteration B could offer more comfortable negotiations and explorations of new roles than the open discussion format of negotiations for iteration A. More research would be required to understand whether differences in age played a part in students’ abilities to enact greater levels of student agency.

**Trumping Student Agency**

A central goal of the study was to find a third space where teachers and students shared agency around text selection; however, the study demonstrated how clearly teacher agency trumped student agency many times over in the study, even with my and teacher participants’ best intentions to provide students with greater levels of agency.

Consider, for example, the initial step of having students find and recommend texts to their teacher. According to the study procedures, students would serve as consultants to their teachers in recommending texts that represented their first space goals but that could also work within the teachers’ lesson. Although the teacher was asking students to recommend texts, and this was something that students appreciated and recognized as a new form of agency, the only way for students to successfully influence the teacher was to please the teacher with their selections. After all, it was through this meeting of the teacher’s
requirements that students could have a chance to see their texts selected for use in class. For some students, this meant having very little agency indeed since topics such as hunting or the latest fashion trends were unlikely to serve the goals of the teacher, either as related to themes in the literature such as in iteration A, or as related to rich sources of rhetorical analysis, as in iteration B. Consider, for example, how Ms. Lawrence simply deleted one of the students’ recommendations that displeased her. So teacher agency trumped student agency simply because students had to make their goals for the text fit within the teacher’s goals for the lesson, and the teacher ultimately decided whether this was done successfully or not.

Students were also subject to their teacher’s requirements and evaluations during the negotiation protocols. This was especially problematic in iteration A when the students faced another round of rejection as they made the case in class for reconsidering their favorite texts, as with Hannah during her negotiations with Mr. Allen. When Mr. Allen calmly explained why he did not select their texts for the lesson, students made little progress toward meeting the teacher’s requirements for the text. As described in the findings section, Mr. Allen suggested to students that if they had made better arguments for the texts they recommended, he possibly could have included their choices. However, this was unlikely since no amount of reasoning could force some of these texts to meet the requirements of a lesson addressing themes of racism. Although the negotiations appeared to go more smoothly in iteration B as evidenced by the students’ satisfaction with the process and with the teacher’s selections overall, neither of the teachers indicated that they had made a change to their initial selections based on comments from students during the negotiations. Mr. Allen did add some honorable mentions to his list, but this simply positioned him more firmly in the role of
a judge selecting winners and losers. So during the negotiations, although students were able to make final pleas for their favorite texts, ultimately the teachers trumped student agency again by restating their initial evaluations.

Finally, teacher agency eclipsed student agency during the actual ELA lesson using students’ recommended texts. In iteration A, Mr. Allen considered not using the text altogether since he was running out of time and needed to move on to the next unit. Although he did find a space within which to use the recommended text, it came at a high price for students, who experienced it as a lengthy homework assignment delivered with the threat of a zero if they did not bring it back completed the next day. The use of the students’ recommended text in iteration B was much less dramatic, and it did appear to meet the students’ needs for interest and engagement; however, Buck recognized the true limits to their agency as students. Buck explained that the lesson was, “More hers. ‘Cause we don’t get to choose when it happens or what we’re going to talk about” (interview response, December 20, 2013). Buck clearly recognized that teacher agency was ultimately the greater source of authority. Although teacher agency often superseded that of students, it is important to note that teachers were acting under external sources of authority from the additional second space, which included curricular requirements and school or district requirements. In order to allow for more student agency, teachers would need to be able to claim more of their own agency within this external second space.

**Teacher Agency on Behalf of Students**

Although the teacher’s goals were much more privileged than students during the study, teachers attempted to make decisions on behalf of students based on their current understandings of students and what they needed to succeed. After all, the teacher
participants were highly educated professionals who made their decisions about curriculum as experts who entered the profession to help students build their knowledge and skills in ways that could empower them in the future. In my initial interview with Mr. Allen, he commented that he wanted to help his students “realize their potential” (November 4, 2013). In order to do so, he participated in weekly meetings with his colleagues to discuss and plan how he could best serve students’ needs. Furthermore, he was concerned about choosing instructional methods that helped his students understand what they read and help them to recognize reliable sources of information online. He valued “forging those personal relationships with students,” something he recognized as one of his successes thus far in teaching (November 4, 2013). Ms. Lawrence indicated having similar goals for students and learning. During my initial interview with Ms. Lawrence, she explained that she left her law practice to become a teacher because she wanted to “help serve my community with my own skills that I knew I had about writing and my love of reading” (December 13, 2013). She reported working to help her students become better readers, writers, and critical thinkers, and she valued hearing from students that she had helped to prepare them for college. In addition, Ms Lawrence reflected upon her teaching practice daily in order to make improvements to her lessons.

The teachers’ concern for students was also reflected in their willingness to participate in the study. They both reported wanting to give their students more control in selecting texts, and they held out hope that the process would benefit students and help them “find texts that they might want to read” (Ms. Lawrence, interview response, December 13, 2013) and help the teacher “find out new information as well” (Mr. Allen, interview response, November 4, 2013). My observations and informal discussions with the teachers
also corroborated that the teacher participants cared deeply about supporting their students’ learning and supporting the development of student agency. All of this is simply to explain that when the teachers made decisions to participate in the study and select texts for the lesson, they did so largely on behalf of students with hopes that students would benefit. If teachers want what is best for their students and will likely retain the greater level of agency in classrooms, the important point may be less about teachers’ stepping aside to allow for more student agency, but more about how can teachers grow in their understanding of what it means to support student agency and why doing so is so important to literacy education.

**Supporting Student Agency**

The literature on student agency suggests that adolescents will need their teacher’s direction, support, and protection in place to claim agency for themselves (Biddulph, 2011; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In this way, high levels of teacher agency are required for students to enact student agency in the traditional contexts of school and classrooms. According to Lensmire (1998), appropriating agency requires struggle to make something new (changing the status quo) out of something old (traditional structures in school). For this struggle to occur in relative safety for students, teachers will need to set the stage. First of all, teachers must be willing to build collaborative relationships with students where students feel protected from the negative consequences of criticizing their teachers’ decisions (Basu, 2008; Comfort, Giorgi, & Moody, 1997). Teachers must also be willing to listen and learn from their students (McKibben, 2004). Finally, teachers must have the freedom to exercise their own authority in order to make collaborative decisions with students without barriers from external sources of authority (Biddulph, 2011).
During the study, many of these conditions were in place for student agency. For example, Mr. Allen and Ms. Lawrence invited students to provide recommendations and feedback, which offered students a sense of collaborative spirit and some protection based on their teachers’ expectations. In addition, both teachers took the time to listen to students and review their recommendations. And finally, the teachers and students had the support of their administrators in conducting the study and incorporating students’ text recommendations. In iteration A, however, students did face risks in openly arguing for their texts in class and receiving the teacher’s response in front of their peers. To provide more protections to iteration B students, students gave their feedback through electronic media, which somewhat lessened the impact to students when criticizing their classmates’ recommendations and teachers’ choices. As another complication to providing student agency, teachers experienced pressure to cover the required curriculum, knowing that students would be taking a state final exam that measured their growth and would affect teachers’ effectiveness ratings. In this way, the teachers in the study were not fully empowered to exercise teacher agency on behalf of students. Nevertheless, without their teachers’ guidance and support in opening new opportunities for collaborative choices for curriculum, it is unlikely that the student participants in either iteration would have been able to exercise new forms of student agency.

**Imagining New Student Agency**

In order for students to enact new forms of agency, they will need their teachers’ help. Bandura (2001) explained that agency requires intentionality and forethought. Intentionality requires that an individual performs an action with the belief that it will produce a desired outcome, and forethought means that the individual was motivated by
thoughtful anticipation of something in the future. If this is so, how could students know that they could recommend texts and effect change in the kinds of reading required in classrooms if teachers did not first invite them to imagine something different? After all, by the time students are in high school, they have likely experienced very little agency around decisions about curriculum. Why would they ever anticipate something different or believe that they could produce a different outcome without teachers or projects such as this revealing a new possibility? So although the study demonstrated that teacher agency often trumped student agency, it may have prompted students to see new possibilities to becoming their own agents for change. Students’ comments in the final interview indicated that some students did perhaps see new such possibilities.

Jayghost: if we voice our opinion on what we like, and as long as it’s in the requirements, then it may be able to happen. (November 26, 2013)

Buck: I learned that not all the time the teacher makes the plans, that sometimes kids can help too. (December 20, 2013)

Brianna: That the teacher’s not the only one who could find something good to read. (December 20, 2013)

Jimkay: I learned that if you wanted to talk to teachers and stuff, like if you don’t like the articles that they’re actually getting you to read and do questions on and stuff, that if you were to do the research and find an article and then give it to the teacher, she can see if it actually goes along with it and make it work. It’s possible! There’s a way to get what you want to make school more interesting. (December 20, 2013)

The students’ answers demonstrate that, although teachers retained the lion’s share of agency during the study, students could at least begin to imagine a new possibility for student agency around curriculum choices based on their experiences. This suggests that teachers can help students begin to imagine and later claim new forms of agency for decision-making about
curriculum. However, how can teachers do this important work if they themselves lack the agency they need to change traditional expectations in classrooms? In order for students to move beyond merely imagining new forms of agency, teachers must themselves be able to imagine and claim more agency for themselves within the external second spaces of authority.

**Prompting New Understandings of Students**

For teachers to exercise teacher agency on behalf of students, they will need a strong understanding of their students to do so most effectively. The procedures in the study, while affording more agency for teachers, did at least provide opportunities for the teacher participants to learn more about their students in ways that may help them support student agency in the future. Consider the following students’ responses during interviews about what their teacher learned:

Melody: [Students] were teaching [Mr. Allen] what they liked and what they think he should teach in class. (November 26, 2013)

Hannah: [He learned] we do better when we like what we’re reading, and not him forcing us to read something we don’t like. (November 26, 2013)

Buck: I think she learned more about things that we like and things that we like to read that interest us a little more. (December 20, 2013)

Xochitl: [Students] still want to learn, but they want to make it more interesting. (November 26, 2013)

Brianna: That we could find good stuff and help her find good stuff. (December 20, 2013)

The students’ comments indicated that they wanted their teachers to understand them better and that the study procedures may have helped. Melody, Hannah, and Buck saw the process
as a way of teaching the teacher about what could better interest students and make them want to read. Xochitl and Brianna expressed that their teachers gained new understandings that students still want to learn and that students can help their teachers make better choices.

Overall, the teacher and student participants differed in their abilities to garner new forms of student agency based on their individual circumstances. Although teacher agency clearly trumped student agency throughout the study, the research on student agency suggests this may actually be necessary since teachers will likely have to exercise their own authority to help students imagine and enact new forms of agency for themselves. To support student agency, teachers will need to build collaborative relationships with students, create circumstances that alleviate students’ fears about negative consequences, be willing to listen, and be somewhat free of limitations from external sources of authority. Although the efforts to foster student agency may be limited as students and teachers become accustomed to new forms of shared agency, the early efforts may still lead to new understandings that are beneficial for teachers and students.

**Implications**

There are many implications along the long continuum between what this study accomplished and what needs to happen to improve literacy learning for adolescents. As explained, what this study accomplished was perhaps an opening to teachers’ and students’ new vision for what could happen around the selection of texts. Students may have caught a glimpse of how reading could be more engaging if they had more opportunities to influence their teachers’ choices, and teachers may have caught a glimpse of how students could become more motivated and engaged around reading if they have some say in what texts are selected. However, the distance from this small glimpse on one end of the continuum down
the long line to what adolescents deserve is a rather long way. However, the study does indicate where barriers and levers to engaged literacy learning may reside along the continuum.

**Leveraging Reading Engagement in First Spaces**

One major lever illuminated by this study was that reading engagement occurs in first space, not second. Although the participants, texts, and contexts were ever changing in the study, one tenet demonstrated consistently was that students became engaged in reading when the text related to their first space goals and interests. Based on my review of the literature, this is rather redundant information since many literacy researchers have already touted the importance of choice and interest for engaging adolescent readers in literacy learning (Alvermann, 2001; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Guthrie & Klauda, 2012; Knoester, 2009; Warrican, 2006). The precept was so intuitive that students knew it without consulting the literature. They commented at multiple points in the study that they would read if they found the material interesting. So according to the student participants in this study, as well as the study findings and literature, first space is where reading engagement lives and thrives.

**Barriers in Curriculum and Standards**

If reading engagement thrives in first spaces, and since we live in a world that includes the Internet and unlimited choices for texts, why are ELA teachers still so largely focused on the canon of classic literature to the exclusion of texts that could essentially rewrite the stories of disinterest and failure in school? The answer suggests some of the barriers along my imaginary continuum toward literacy engagement for students. For one thing, as mentioned earlier, ELA teachers may teach largely as they were taught, using texts
that they enjoyed when they were students. Furthermore, there are additional pressures from external sources, such as administrators, parents, and colleagues, who could also have expectations that traditional literature be used. In addition, ELA teachers may have a difficult time seeing the curriculum as fluid enough to incorporate texts from students’ first spaces. Some may even claim that the Common Core State Standards for ELA do not allow such flexibility in the curriculum. However, a careful look at the standards would reveal that many are essentially text-neutral. For example, consider the following three standards pulled from the standards for Reading Informational Text in the 11-12 grade band:

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy (e.g., The Federalist, presidential addresses).

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem. (NGAC-CCSSO, 2010)

The top and bottom items out of three of those copied here do not indicate specific texts teachers must use. Only the second indicates a specific text, or type of texts, that students should study in order to meet the requirement of the standard. Overall, out of ten standards for Reading Informational Text, only two define what types of texts must be used. Furthermore, the third standard listed above, clearly recognizes multiple forms of expression, including visuals and quantitative representations, which open the door to some of the multimedia texts students enjoy. Clearly there is some flexibility in the standards for using texts and topics that more students may find engaging to read.
Barriers in Building Units of Study

The barrier may instead lie in schools’ and teachers’ conception of curriculum and instruction and how units of study are organized for delivery to students. In the school where the study was conducted, teachers worked together in PLC groups to organize teaching standards into curriculum units. Although the units were given titles indicating certain forms of knowledge and skills to be learned and practiced, many teachers still tended to teach a unit around a text, such as Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*. Teachers rarely spoke about teaching a unit on determining central ideas within a text, for example. Instead, they talked about needing to “start *Romeo and Juliet*” (Mr. Allen, fieldnotes, December 5, 2013). Building units around these traditional texts, using a curriculum-based text selection practice, relegated students’ text selections to more supportive roles. Furthermore, simply organizing the learning into predetermined units that had to be “covered” led to the sense from teachers that there was little time for incorporating texts of interest to students. This lock-step view of curriculum builds rigidity into the second space goals of teachers so that students’ first space goals are squeezed out. In order to build more flexibility into the curriculum, teachers will need to explore how curriculum can be more fluid and how broad skill sets such as critical thinking and employing multiple forms of literacy can take precedence, thus opening up the curriculum for a variety to texts and forms of literacy.

Leveraging Multiple Forms of Literacy

Opening ELA classrooms to include multiple forms of literacy is another important lever for moving teachers and students further down the continuum toward classrooms that are more open and more inclusive of students’ first space reading goals. Part of the
disconnect between teachers’ text selections and students’ text selections was that teacher deemed some texts as inappropriate for use in the classroom or for the lesson, such as Gabrielle’s photo-laden text about shoes or Gabe’s text about fishing. Gabrielle recognized that “in school we have to read things that are ‘school appropriate’” (Marie, form submission, December 17, 2013). Street (2003) describes this notion in schools as autonomous models of literacy:

The standard view in many fields, from schooling to development programs, works from the assumption that literacy in itself—autonomously—will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. Introducing literacy to poor, "illiterate" people, villages, urban youth etc. will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their "illiteracy" in the first place. I refer to this as an "autonomous" model of literacy. The model, I suggest, disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal and that literacy as such will have these benign effects.

(p. 77)

The autonomous model of literacy assumes that there is only one correct way to “do literacy”—one way to speak correctly or write correctly, or in the case of this study, only certain types of texts deemed appropriate for use in classrooms.

The alternative to this view is an ideological model of literacy, which is more culturally sensitive and recognizes literacy as a social practice that is never really neutral. The importance of this model is that it pulls back the Wizard of Oz’s curtain to reveal the true mechanisms behind what is deemed the one “great and powerful” form of literacy—essentially the mechanisms providing yet another way the dominant group can dominate and marginalize others. I do not suggest here that the teachers in this study sought to dominate and marginalize students who did not fit their preconceived notion of what it means to be a motivated and capable reader. After all, the views about what counts for literacy were likely
not within the immediate control, or even awareness, of these teachers. What I suggest instead is how easy it is, in the current banking system of education (Friere, 1986), to forget that there are multiple ways of “doing literacy” none of which can be called right or wrong. Part of what schools and teachers must do then, is recognize that multiple forms of literacy, including multiple types of texts (including those about fishing and shoes), are valid for use and for study. Once they understand that themselves, they can then begin to pull back the curtain for students, helping them to see that their own preferred methods of literacy are just as valid as the ones they typically study for school.

**Valuing Multiple Forms of Literacy in the Real World**

Although I stress here the importance of valuing multiple forms of literacy and opening students’ and teachers’ eyes to an ideological model, I also recognize that part of what teachers must do for students is prepare them for success after high school, for the autonomous-literacy world that currently exists. Personally speaking, I know that my own success in life as a student, teacher, and researcher, was made possible because someone showed me how to “do literacy” properly. I certainly did not learn to do this at home with my family or among my peers. As I write this, in fact, there is someone waiting to tell me whether or not I have done it correctly. They may even ask me to remove this section of the dissertation, since it crosses a boundary into something unusual that my dissertation committee may see as risky, awkward, or too personal. I wish they would not, but an ideological viewpoint may not protect me. The point of this is to demonstrate that while academicians do the important work of opening up people’s views about literacy, students in high school still need two things: more engaging readings and the kinds of literacy skills that
will help them find academic and career success after high school. These two goals do not need to remain exclusive of each other.

The procedures developed in this study hold promise for marrying the goals of valuing multiple forms of literacy and helping students develop literacy skills needed for success, such as those prescribed by the standards. As such, the study builds upon the work of Gutierrez et al. (1992), who applied third space as a way to build bridges between dominant views of literacy and the students’ literacies practiced in their home communities. Similarly, this study developed a set of procedures for having teachers and students find texts that met both their needs, thereby building bridges from the dominant literacy skills valued and taught in the second spaces of schools to the texts students find most interesting in their first spaces. This study also builds upon Moje et al.’s (2004) work with third spaces, where opening spaces for conversations about competing knowledges (or in this case competing views of what counts as appropriate reading material) can begin to challenge and reshape academic literacies as well as the literacies of young people. The findings in this study suggest that, although a rather small space was opened for students to assert their first space goals and select more interesting informational texts, the study opened students’ and teachers’ eyes to new possibilities for building third spaces around choices for reading and curriculum.

**Design Experiments to Move the Field**

As explained in chapter three, I employed a design experiment approach (Brown, 1992), which allowed for the classroom procedures to be adjusted as needed between iterations. The approach proved to be useful in this study for testing and adjusting a set of protocols to support negotiations between teachers and students around choices for
curriculum. My goal, as with most design experiments, was to produce a broadly usable and effective set of classroom procedures (Brown, 1992; Gorard, Roberts, & Taylor, 2004). Based on my findings from iterations A and B, it appeared that the procedures employed in iteration B were more effective. However, I cannot determine with any certainly if my procedures were responsible for the outcomes. After all, as explained earlier, the participants and classroom contexts for iterations A and B were very different.

I argue, however, that this problem is inherent to any studies attempting to find ways to influence change within classrooms. In the real world of schools, contexts and participants are ever changing, even from day to day in the same classroom. The only way to resolve the matter is to test a set of procedures many times and within many contexts. The design experiment approach, then, is appropriate, even critical, for developing procedures that can lessen barriers to negotiation and to the development of third spaces around literacy practice. Through a design experiment approach, as new procedures are tested, adjusted, and shown to be effective within multiple classroom contexts over time, researchers can be more certain that their contributions are moving the field of adolescent literacy forward within real classrooms.

Limitations

Any findings and insights gained from this study should be tempered with consideration for its limitations. First of all, the qualitative study involved an in-depth examination of two classrooms with unique participants and circumstances. Therefore, the findings are specific to the participants’ unique situations and cannot be generalized as if applicable in other classrooms or individuals.
Secondly, and as explained earlier, although the study compared two iterations to see if changes to classroom protocols for negotiation could influence shared agency around decisions for curriculum, there is no way of knowing if the differences between the iterations were due to any real improvements to the classroom protocols, or simply to differences between characteristics of the participants. For example, the students in iteration B had overall different attitudes toward reading when compared to the students in iteration A, as evidenced by the differing ranges of reading attitudes. The ninth grade class contained more students with very low and very high-range attitudes toward reading, and their average attitude ratings were much lower. In comparison, the eleventh grade class contained readers who were more similar to each other, with fewer students at the lowest and highest ranges of reading attitudes, and on average, the eleventh grade classes had higher reading attitudes overall. The differences could indicate several possibilities. For example, some of the lowest-range readers may have dropped out before reaching the eleventh grade. Or perhaps the students in Ms. Lawrence’s class enjoyed their recent reading for class, or had been lucky enough to have several teachers or family members who encouraged reading more than the students in Mr. Allen’s class had experienced.

Furthermore, the students’ ages and the teachers’ levels of experience were also different. The students differing ages may have influenced the abilities of students to act as agents on their own behalf. In addition, the differences in teachers and their levels of experience likely also played a part in differing outcomes for each iteration. By examining only two classes of participants, and by changing protocols in between, there can be no compelling and definitive conclusions about how and why the process appeared somewhat more successful in iteration B.
In addition, as explained in chapter three, my positionality in the study may have also influenced the participants’ behaviors and the resulting data. As the chief academic officer for Person County Schools, I direct many decisions about curriculum and instruction for the school district. Therefore, teachers may have interacted differently with students or answered my interview questions differently as the result of my position in the district. Although I made clear to participants that I would keep my work role separate from my researcher role, they were likely to feel uncomfortable expressing some of their thoughts and ideas about pressures related to curriculum and instruction in the district. Furthermore, my work as a school district official may have increased my influence on power dynamics in the classroom space even more than is usual during classroom research since the participating teachers had to join my space and my set of requirements as both participants in the study and as teachers in the district where I lead. Given my position as both a researcher and district official, teachers were potentially limited in what they would say and do during the study, thereby affecting the resulting data and findings.

Of course, students may have also been influenced by my presence, but for different reasons. During my informal interactions with teachers they both mentioned that their students enjoyed my visits because it gave them a break from their typical classroom activities. Indeed, I may have served as a form of novelty for students that influenced their positive attitudes toward the study and my interactions with them. Although the study is intended to inform similar types of work in other classrooms, possibly as initiated by the teachers, the level of enthusiasm for students could be less or different without the presence and novelty of a stranger.
Future Studies

An interesting consideration is what my next iteration of the study would look like. I would extend the study beyond just a few weeks since it would be interesting to see how teachers and students would respond to repeated opportunities for shared selection of texts to see how their choices would evolve and how mutual learning would be influenced over time. Here is what my next study iteration would look like:

- Choose one class to work with for an entire semester of high school.
- Encourage multiple opportunities for shared agency around text selection, not restricted to informational texts, but open to multiple forms of reading over the course of the semester.
- Form student committees, as suggested by Ms. Lawrence, to further narrow the students’ selections before the teacher reviews them.
- Work toward student committees making the final decisions for some text selections, depending upon the teachers’ level of trust over the course of the semester.
- Continue looking for indicators of general engagement and reading engagement around the student-recommended texts.

Beyond the next iteration, it would also be interesting to expand the types of curriculum decisions involving shared agency to include decisions other than text selection, such as parameters for assignments, methods of instruction, or even grading practices.

Continuing Toward Third Spaces

Although during the study I was only able to collaborate with teachers and students in opening small spaces within the curriculum to allow the inclusion of more of students’ first spaces, I am not ready to give up on the goal of students and teachers working together to
build third spaces for learning. In order for this to occur, external sources of authority will have to loosen the reins on teachers with regard to required curriculum and assessments. Teachers will have to envision new structures for curriculum that focus more on critical thinking around multiple forms of literacy, rather than lock-step instruction and rigid units of study around canonical literature. In addition, teachers and students will need to imagine and experiment with new forms of shared decision making, where the teacher’s second space is allowed to be more fluid and open, and the students’ first spaces are treated as important and valid. I believe that true third spaces will exist when marginalized students can say with impunity that “this does not work for me,” and teachers respond, not with judgment or disappointment or frustration, but consider that the problem may lie with the curriculum, instructional practice, or text, rather than with the student.
APPENDIX A: COPY OF STUDENT SURVEY ADAPTED FROM RHODY SECONDARY READING ATTITUDE ASSESSMENT

Directions:

This is a test to tell how you feel about reading. The score will NOT affect your grade. Read each statement and select the box description for how you feel about the statement.

1. Type your first and last name here. (Your real name will not be used in the study report.)

2. Type your preferred pseudonym here—first name only. (This is the name used in any study reports instead of your real name. Use the same pseudonym throughout the study.)

3. You feel you have better things to do than read.

4. You rarely buy something to read.

5. You are willing to tell people that you do not like to read.

6. You have a lot of books or other things to read in your room.

7. You like to read whenever you have free time.

8. You get really excited about books or other things you have read.

9. You love to read.

10. You like to read books or articles written by well-known authors.
APPENDIX A (CONTINUED):

Survey Adapted from Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. You never check out reading materials from the library.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. You like to stay at home and read.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. You seldom read except when it is required for school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. You think reading is a waste of time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. You think reading is boring.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. You think people are strange when they read a lot.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. You like to read to escape from problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. You make fun of people who read a lot.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. You like to share books or other reading materials with your friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. You would rather someone just tell you information so that you won't have to read to get it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A (CONTINUED):

## Survey Adapted from Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22. You generally check out something to read when you go to the library.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. It takes you a long time to read something.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. You like to broaden your interests through reading.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. You read a lot.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. You like to improve your vocabulary so you can use more words.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. You like to get books or other reading materials for gifts.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Which would you rather read, fiction or non-fiction?</td>
<td>fiction (novels or stories)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-fiction (information based on fact)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. In your own words, describe how you feel about reading in general.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

224
APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION PROTOCOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Protocols for observing general classroom engagement included the four engagement indicators from the Classroom AIMS instrument (Fredricks et al., 2011; Roehrig, 2003; Stanulis & Floden, 2009). These four indicators of classroom engagement were as follows:

- staying on task (at least 80 percent of students were consistently on task and highly engaged in class activities)
- self-regulation (students were so self-regulated that disciplinary encounters were rarely seen)
- participating in class (students eagerly raised their hands and participated)
- expressing excitement (students vocalized/expressed excitement about content/activities—lots of oohs and aahs)

Protocols for observing general classroom disengagement—Although the Classroom AIMS instrument did not provide indicators of disengagement, the absence of the above indicators would indicate disengagement. For example, if more than 20% of students were off-task, if the teacher had to discipline students for behavior, if students were not participating in class, and if students were not expressing excitement, this would indicate general classroom disengagement.

Protocols for observing engaged reading came from Guthrie’s (2004) definition of engaged reading. According to this definition, I looked for indicators of the following:

- focused reading (students intently looked at reading material with apparent extended focus)
- intrinsic motivation (students indicated wanting to find informational texts for themselves rather than for the teacher)
- strategy use (students sought/asked for strategies to find the texts they wanted to read about; students could articulate how they went about reading and selecting articles)
- social interaction (students discussed the articles they were finding and reading with others)

Protocols for observing unengaged reading came from Guthrie, Soloman, and Rinehart’s (1997) characterization of unengaged readers. According to this characterization, I looked for the following indicators of unengaged reading:

- reading for extrinsic purposes only (students questioned how to earn good grades or comply with teacher requests)
- surface level reading (students read the words on a surface level—skimming, for example--without employing strategies for understanding, or they did not read at all)
APPENDIX C: COPY OF STUDENT FORM
RECOMMEND AN INFORMATIONAL TEXT TO YOUR TEACHER

Complete this form to recommend an informational text to your teacher. Complete a new form for every informational text you recommend. Thanks so much! * Required

**Your Real Name** *
(Your name will never be used in the study report.)

**Your Pseudonym** *
(Use the same pseudonym each time. This is the name that will be used if you are mentioned in a study report.)

**Title** *
(What is the title of the informational text you are recommending?)

**Link to Text**
(Copy the weblink to the text, or tell where it can be found.)

**Brief Description**
(In a few words, tell what the text is about.)

**Justification**
(Write a paragraph or more arguing why this informational text should be included in your teacher's lesson.)

**How is this text different from what you typically read in school?**

**How did you find this text?**

Submit
APPENDIX D: COPY OF STUDENT FORM
STUDENT FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

Please share information about what this experience (participating in the study and making text recommendations to your teacher) was like for you, and share how you think the experience can be improved. Your responses will in no way affect your grade in the class.

How did you feel about being asked to recommend informational texts to your teacher?

Describe how you selected informational texts. What criteria did you use?

Why do you think the teacher included (or did not include) the texts you recommended?

Explain: Will you feel different about reading texts your class recommended compared to reading texts your teacher selected for you?

Do you think you and your teacher were able to negotiate a “third space”? Why or why not. A third space is where a student's perspective (first space) and the school/teacher's perspective (second space) are combined to construct new ways of knowing and doing.

What did you gain, if anything, from this experience?

How could this experience be improved for you or other students in the future?

Submit
APPENDIX E: PLANNED QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW ONE WITH TEACHERS

(Questions to be asked after reviewing and clarifying the study procedures)

1. How did you become a high school English language arts teacher?
2. What have been your greatest challenges and greatest successes in teaching?
3. What have been your greatest challenges and successes thus far with this class?
4. What is your perception of who adolescents are and what they are capable of doing in high school?
5. How do you make decisions about what and how to teach?
6. Thinking about the lesson you most recently taught to the class, how did you plan the lesson? How did you choose the text(s) students read for the lesson?
7. What role do students generally play in planning the curriculum and/or teaching in your classroom? Do they get to choose texts at any point, for example?
8. How do you feel about giving students more agency in the selection of texts for one of your lessons?
9. Do you think students will understand the concept of third space?
10. How do you define informational text?
   a. What sorts of examples of informational texts do you use with your students?
   b. Why these texts in particular?
   c. Is there anything particularly challenging about teaching informational texts? If so, what are those challenges?
   d. Does teaching informational texts differ from teaching other sorts of texts?
   e. What informational texts do you think students read outside of school?
11. What are your predictions for how students will respond to being asked to find informational texts for a future lesson?
12. What challenges do you predict the students will have?
13. What challenges do you predict you will have?
14. How do you predict the negotiation piece will go?
15. What do you hope will be the outcome of this process? For your students? For you and your teaching?
APPENDIX E (CONTINUED): PLANNED QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW TWO WITH TEACHERS

(Questions to be asked after each study iteration is complete)

1. How would you describe the study as it occurred in your classroom? What role did you play? What role did the students play? What role did I play?

2. Were you surprised by anything that happened over the course of the study? Such as?

3. What do you think the students learned from the experience?
   a. About building a third space?
   b. About student and teacher agency?
   c. About informational texts?

4. What did you learn from the experience?
   a. About building a third space?
   b. About student and teacher agency?
   c. About informational texts?

5. What changes would you make to the study for the future?

6. What changes would you make to the procedures for negotiation?
APPENDIX F: PLANNED QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW WITH SELECT STUDENTS

(Questions to be asked after each study iteration is complete)

1. How would you describe the study; in other words, what was your role, your teacher’s role, and my role?

2. Were you surprised by anything that happened over the course of the study?

3. What do you think your teacher learned from the experience?

4. What did you learn from this experience?

5. What did you learn about building a third space and negotiating with your teacher?

6. Did you feel like your role as a student changed through this process? In other words, do you think you were treated differently as a student through this experience?

7. What articles did you select? Were these used in the teacher’s lesson or unit?

8. Did knowing you/your classmates helped to select the texts change how you felt about reading them during the lesson?

9. Would you like to be involved in helping your teachers design lessons in the future? Why or why not?

10. Do you think most teachers would be interested in having students help with their lessons? Why or why not?

11. Would this process help other high school students?

12. Do you think this process would help high school students with reading in any way? Why or why not?

13. What changes do you recommend that I make to this process in the future?
“Second space” guidelines (Mr. Allen):

- Relate it to the *To Kill a Mockingbird* unit.
- Choose an Informational Text [Common Core Definition of Informational Text](#)
- Is it the right level for 9th grade?
  - What is text complexity? [Common Core Text Complexity](#)
  - What does Lexile **1080-1305** look like? [Samples Here](#)
  - Checking Lexile Levels
    - Lexile Analyzer: [https://www.lexile.com/analyzer/](https://www.lexile.com/analyzer/)(ID wtask@centurylink.net PSWD secondspace)
    - Practice article: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/opinion/sunday/too-much-helicopter-parenting.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/opinion/sunday/too-much-helicopter-parenting.html)

“First space” guidelines (you):

- Do you find it interesting?

- Does it relate to ideas you know and care about?

- It is meaningful to you?

Where to start your search:

- Symbaloo [http://edu.symbaloo.com/shared/AAAABponmDMAA42ACqSKRA==](http://edu.symbaloo.com/shared/AAAABponmDMAA42ACqSKRA==)

When you are ready to submit an informational text:

[https://docs.google.com/a/person.k12.nc.us/forms/d/151YawFQ-YXubiQNP-WLZ2CUkEk1Bg7CitimN51Gir0/viewform](https://docs.google.com/a/person.k12.nc.us/forms/d/151YawFQ-YXubiQNP-WLZ2CUkEk1Bg7CitimN51Gir0/viewform)
APPENDIX H: HERE ARE MY SELECTIONS...

5 Most Unjust Convictions of Black Men that were Overturned
Racism Alive and Swell in NFL
Jay Z and Barneys Announce Substantial Changes in Their Partnership
No Doubt Removes "Looking Hot" Music Video Over Racism Claims

I really liked these articles because they touched on themes that we see in To Kill a Mockingbird. People really helped their cases when they went into detail in their justification sections for why their articles were connected to the novel and why we should read them in class. They also helped to talk about racism, prejudice, and how they are still impacting much of our world today.

If you do not see your article written above, it is most likely due to you not explaining clearly enough the relationship between it and the novel. I think people found things they were interested outside of the book and did not explain how they could be used with the novel in class. If you would like to still make a case for why your article should be used in conjunction with the book, please write your explanation below over the weekend and turn this in on Monday:

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

I really value your opinion and I want your voice to be heard. Please don’t get down if you don’t see your article listed. There is still time for it to make the cut. All you need to do is tell me why in writing. Thanks for all your hard work!
APPENDIX I: STEPS IN PROTOCOL FOR TEXT SELECTION AND NEGOTIATION

Step 1: Meet with the teacher to

(a) discuss and refine the classroom procedures,
(b) select a future lesson or unit for which students will select informational texts, and
(c) set the plan for introducing the task to students.

Additional Notes for Step 1:
- Stress that students will be taking on new roles as consultants providing expert advice about what texts best engage them in reading.
- Guide the teacher to develop a plan for using the text in a future lesson that requires less direct connection to a particular theme or book.
- Ask the teacher to plan a set amount of time for each step and to protect that time as planned.

Step 2: In collaboration with the teacher, introduce the task to the students and have them find and recommend informational texts. The basic elements were to

(a) explain to students that they will serve as consultants to the teacher to select informational texts for an upcoming lesson,
(b) explain Third Space Theory and share with students the parameters of the “second space” within which the teacher works, including the goals/standards for the lesson and requirements for text complexity,
(c) invite students to consider their own “first space” and how they may represent that space in their text selections,
(d) instruct students in online search processes and useful websites, and
(e) establish a period of time for students to find and select texts (two or three days for about 30-45 minutes each day).

Additional Notes for Step 2:
- Stress again to students that they are taking on new roles as consultants by providing expert advice to their teacher.
- Explain Lexile levels and show examples of texts on that grade level.

Step 3: Provide an opportunity for the students and teacher to negotiate which text(s) will ultimately be included in the lesson, which consisted of four steps,

(a) explain to students that the teacher’s initial selections are not final but just the first step toward negotiation,
(b) have the teacher present her selections and reasoning in a document students can review,
(c) give students at least one day to process the teacher’s choices and plan their responses for negotiation,
(d) share the plan with students for how the negotiation will work.

Additional Notes for Step 3:
- Ask the teacher to provide students with time in class to review the informational texts initially selected before providing their feedback.
- Have students use electronic media (email and Google forms) for communicating their negotiations with the teacher.
“Second space” guidelines (Ms. Lawrence):

- Relate it to the teacher’s lesson (analyzing informational text).
- Choose an Informational Text [Common Core Definition of Informational Text]
- Is it the right level for 11th grade?
  - What is text complexity? [Common Core Text Complexity]
  - What does Lexile 1215-1355 look like? [Samples Here]

“First space” guidelines (you):

- Do you find it interesting?
- Does it relate to ideas you know and care about?
- It is meaningful to you?

Where to start your search:

- Symbaloo [http://edu.symbaloo.com/shared/AAAABponmDMAA42ACqSKRA==]

When you are ready to submit an informational text:
[https://docs.google.com/a/person.k12.nc.us/forms/d/1gwKGZp4XfNWMuf5jNDAvmmXeVm_uesLKt3xY8PQcKFc/viewform]
APPENDIX K: EMAIL TEACHER B SENT TO STUDENTS FOR REVIEW

Here are my top three picks from the articles you selected. Take a look at these and see which ones interest you.


There were many, many other great articles suggested. Here are some:


An Hispanic boy sang at an NBA game where the audience tweeted racist slurs: http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865581621/Racist-NBA-fans-attack-11-year-olds-national-anthem.html


Apple’s CEO Tim Cook speaks out about discrimination, same-sex marriage, and immigration reforms: http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/16/tech/web/apple-cook-civil-rights/index.html


Consultant Recommendations

Your username will be recorded when you submit this form.
* Required

Recommendations *
What do you think of the selections by Ms. Lawrence? Should she eliminate one or add another article? Please give reasons for your suggestions.

Send me a copy of my response.

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.
REFERENCES


Tarasiuk, T. J. (2010). Combining traditional and contemporary texts: Moving my English class to the computer lab. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53*(7), 543-552.


