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Children's Literature in the Elementary Schools: Which Books Are Being Chosen for Literacy Instruction?

Shauna Rae Raby
Brigham Young University - Provo

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: WHICH BOOKS ARE BEING CHOSEN FOR LITERACY INSTRUCTION?

By

Shauna R. Raby

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of a thesis submitted by

Shauna R. Raby

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

_____	_____
Date	James S. Jacobs, Chair
_____	_____
Date	Roni Jo Draper
_____	_____
Date	Timothy G. Morrison

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_____ _____

Date James S. Jacobs
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

_____

Roni Jo Draper
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

_____

Barbara Culatta
Associate Dean
David O. McKay School of Education

ABSTRACT

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: WHICH BOOKS ARE BEING CHOSEN FOR LITERACY INSTRUCTION?

Shauna R. Raby

Department of Teacher Education

Master of Arts

Research has shown the value of using children's literature for reading instruction. As teachers incorporate more children's literature into their programs, questions arise as to the choices they are making about which books to use for literacy instruction. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of children's literature in two literacy activities, teacher read aloud and literature circles, in grade four through six classrooms in Central School District. Teachers from this group were asked to complete a survey for each children's literature book they used for teacher read aloud and literature circles during one school year. A descriptive analysis summarizing the characteristics of the information collected in the surveys was conducted. Results indicated there was variability in the number and titles of books the sample teachers used in their classrooms, some books were read in more than one classroom, fiction and chapter books were

chosen more often than informational or picture books. The sample teachers selected books for a variety of reasons, with the greatest consideration being what they thought the students would like.

Teachers selected books for literature circles from the schools' guided reading libraries most often, and teachers chose books for teacher read aloud based on their own likes and according to other teachers recommendations. The teacher's responses to the research questions reflected heavy reliance on the contents of the school guided reading library to support literature circle reading groups. While the development of the guided reading library in each of the sample schools has created a resource for teachers, the contents may limit the genres of children's literature that teachers use for literacy instruction. If, indeed, teachers depend upon the guided reading library for the majority of the books they use in literature circles, the quality and quantity of the books in the guided reading library may warrant further study.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Using children's literature for literacy instruction in the classroom has a varied history. Traditionally, literacy instruction was mostly confined to controlled-vocabulary, basal-type readers (Paris, Wixson, & Palinscar, 1986; Pearson, 2002), while the classroom use of children's literature was largely reserved for another purpose—the teacher read aloud (Trelease, 1989). Then in the early 1970's, educational researchers began incorporating more psycholinguistic theory into their discussions on reading instruction (Goodman, 1989). This theory placed value on students' experiences in making meaning from the texts that they read and opened the door for authentic children's literature to be incorporated into, or to take the place of, many basal reading programs (Pearson, 2002). In the late 1980s, the use of children's literature became an important component of what was known as a *language-based approach* to literacy (Goodman, 1989; Paris, et. al 1986). This view highlighted learning as a social process (Gavelek, 1986; Wertsch, 1985) and led the mainstream education society to more widely encourage the use of children's literature for teaching reading (Cambourne, 2002; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Rudman, 1976; Williams, 1999).

Currently the language-based approach to reading incorporates explicit teaching of skills with the use of children's literature and is used by many educators. This method supports substantial use of children's books for literacy instruction (Pearson, 2002, Raskinski, et al., 2000; Smith, 1997). Consequently, the trend of using children's

literature to teach reading continues, with more than two-thirds of educators surveyed in 1998 showing significant enthusiasm for the use of children's literature in their literacy programs (Commeyras & Degroff, 1998). Indeed, Rasinski et al. (2000) declared "using literature in the classroom yields rich rewards" (p. 1).

A variety of research has supported the use of children's literature as an instructional tool (Jacobs & Tunnell, 1989). Eldredge and Butterfield's (1986) study suggested that when teachers used children's literature as the reading text, students achieved higher reading gains. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson's (1985) *Becoming a Nation of Readers* documented the importance of reading children's literature as a critical component of all elementary school programs. Nancie Atwell's (1987) *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning With Adolescents* as been considered influential in supporting the use of literature in the classroom (Pearson, 2002). Her work with middle school students demonstrated how using literature to teach literacy not only facilitated the learning of required skills, but also helped the students become more interested in books. The role of authentic and appropriate literature for children is recognized as important to children's literacy development (Rasinski, et al, 2000), and the success of using a literature-based program is well documented (Cullinan, 1992; Laughlin & Swisher, 1990).

Central School District (pseudonym) in Utah uses literature-based instruction as the approved district-wide literacy program. Teachers are directed by district administrators to use a literacy framework developed by the Foundation for Comprehensive Early Literacy Learning (Swartz, 2003). This method of literacy instruction includes two components for the elementary schools, the Comprehensive

Early Literacy Learning (CELL) and Extended Literacy Learning (ExLL) framework for classroom instruction. The ExLL program is used in the upper elementary grades. Integral to this literacy instruction approach in upper elementary grades are five reading activities; teacher read aloud, shared reading, directed reading, phonological skills instruction and independent reading. As part of directed reading, teachers use an instructional technique called literature circles. Literature circles is an activity where a group of students read and discuss a book. The CELL/ExLL program encourages the use of children's literature for literacy instruction predominately in the areas of teacher read aloud and literature circles.

With growing use of children's literature in many classrooms, teachers have a greater responsibility in choosing which books they will use for literacy instruction. There is a wide variety of children's literature from which to select. The book market is filled with children's literature, such as picture books, novels, poetry, and informational books, as well as books printed for the express purpose of teaching literacy. Additionally, current children's literature presents information on almost every subject. Some books are written to introduce a topic or concept (Murphy, 1997; Rudman, 1976). For example, books that feature alphabet letters, such as *From Acorn to Zoo* (Kitamura, 1992), or that give examples, as in *My Five Senses* (Brandenberg, 1989), introduce topics that can be expanded upon in the classroom. Some books present numerous examples of a particular concept or theme (Anderson, 2002; Walsh, 2003), like the focus on the Islamic religion found in, *What Do We Know about Islam?* (Husain, 1996), *One Night: A Story from the Desert* (Kessler, 1995), or *Magrid Fasts for Ramadan* (Matthews, 1996). Some publishers supply books that feature popular characters from television or movies

(Greenway, 2001; Shaloo, 1993). Children's literature is published in a broad selection of formats and covers a wide range of topics.

The increase in a wider variety of books has provided many quality books from which teachers are able to choose (Smith, 1997). This may lead one to ask, "Is there a need for further study regarding the choice of children's literature that is used in the classroom?"

Statement of the Purpose

While state policymakers and local school districts maintain curriculum standards and offer assistance in providing approved textbooks, they also delegate some curriculum and instruction decisions to the classroom teachers (Wixson & Dutro, 1999). Often the choice of children's literature to be used in the classroom is left to the classroom teacher. For example, in Central School District, there is little administrative guidance regarding which children's literature books to use in their classroom literacy instruction. Currently, there are no recommendations or approved lists from which teachers must choose. However, each school in Central School District has established a school *guided reading library*, a collection of books that is organized according to reading ability level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Each book set contains five to seven copies of the book so a group of children can read the same book and use it as the basis of discussion in literature circle groups. Each school literacy specialist assumed primary responsibility for deciding which books to purchase for each school's guided reading library. Additionally, teachers donated sets of classroom books to the guided reading library.

Given this support, teachers may use the guided reading library as a resource to obtain the children's literature used in the classroom. However, teachers have the

freedom to include a wide variety of children's literature books in their classroom and are not required to use the guided reading library. Teachers are expected to make appropriate instructional decisions as to which literature books to use in the classroom. This places the responsibility for choosing appropriate literature squarely on the shoulders of each classroom teacher.

Although some research has been conducted on the nature of children's literature used in the classroom for literacy instruction, for example, comparisons of student reading achievement between literature-based and basal reading instruction (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004), relatively little is known about which books teachers select for use in the classroom or how teachers learn about and consequently choose those books. Because each student has the opportunity of studying only a limited number of literature books in class during a school year, inquiry into which titles teachers are choosing for use in the classroom is of interest. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers choose the children's literature titles for use in the classroom.

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research were: (a) Which children's literature books did teachers chose for use in upper elementary grade classrooms, for both teacher read aloud and literature circles? (b) Why did the teachers select those books? (c) How did the teachers find out about the children's literature titles they selected?

Limitations

This was a descriptive research study that consisted of collecting information from teachers who belong to a single school district and teach in grades four through six. The population surveyed was not a random, statistical sampling, but it was limited to

fourth through six grade teachers in Central School District. Though this information may provide some basis for making a prediction that would hold true to a larger population, it was not the intent of this study.

Additionally, there was no attempt to determine correlations between the children's books chosen and why they were chosen or where the teacher learned about the book. Neither was there any desire to assign significance to the interrelatedness of the three questions and the demographic information at this time.

By limiting the inquiry to a study exploring which titles were chosen for use in the classroom and how those titles were selected, there was no intention to suggest that there were not other issues that need to be addressed in relationship to the use of children's literature in the classroom. Rather, the purpose of this study was to explore educators' instructional decision-making in choosing children's literature for teacher read aloud and literature circles. A comprehensive list of those titles was made and an answer generated as to why each book was chosen and how the teacher learned of the book.

Definition of Terms

The *CELL/ExLL* model is a scientifically based approach to teacher development that focuses on teaching methods and using assessment to inform instruction (Swartz, 2003). It presents a framework that encourages educators to build a literacy program through integration of curriculum. Teacher read aloud and literature circles are important elements of the CELL/ExLL framework. This homogeneous approach to teaching literacy throughout Central School District adds uniformity to the way literacy is taught in each classroom. All teacher participants have a common vocabulary for the procedures

and terminology of literacy when interacting with students and other educators in the district.

Children's literature refers to trade books (books other than textbooks or reference books) which are published for the retail market written for children, birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children of those ages, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1993).

The school's *literacy specialist* is "a general term referring to educational personnel with advanced training in reading education" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 213). In Central School District this refers to the teacher chosen to work with the teachers and the principal to oversee the reading program within the school.

A *literature circle* is a literacy learning activity where organized groups of children read the same book and meet together to share their personal responses and interpretations of the book with one another. The teacher sets up a system for choosing the books and schedules times for the students to meet, usually three to five times a week. The teacher structures the discussion to focus on a particular topic or the discussion may be open-ended. The goal is for the children to talk more meaningfully about story elements, information from the text, or personal interpretations (Short & Klassen, 1993).

Central School District teachers use literature circles in the upper elementary grades as the primary literacy activity. Typically the groups have four to six students; however, the size of the group varies according to classroom needs, students' abilities and variables such as availability of books or time constraints. When the teacher is teaching the students how to conduct a literature circle, the whole class may be included

in the instruction and discussion group. The group may be smaller because fewer students read at the level represented by the book.

The district recommends that the literature circles meet frequently, with two to three times a week being the average. The teacher meets with the group at least once a week. When the teacher is not present during the discussion, a student is designated as group leader. Each time the group meets every student has an assigned role and discussion responsibility (Daniels, 1994).

The text for a literature circle is generally a children's literature book. The teacher may assign a book to the group, or the students may suggest which book they would like to read from a group of pre-selected books. The teacher makes the final decision for which books the students will read for the literature circle groups.

Teacher read aloud is a literacy activity when the teacher reads aloud to the whole class or small groups from a children's literature book. Fountas & Pinnell (996) stated, "Reading aloud makes available rich content so children can analyze texts and compare them . . . [it] forms a foundation for other reading and writing activities (p. 22). As defined in this study, teacher read aloud will be limited to literacy instruction. Teacher read aloud is an important component of the Central School district mandated literacy program.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For many years, children's literature played a supplementary role in most elementary classrooms. Excerpts and adaptations of literature were sometimes used to teach reading (Pearson, 2002) and teachers read from children's books to their students (Ellis, 1968). However, within the past 20 years many educators have come to acknowledge the critical role that children's literature plays in teaching literacy (Rasinski, et. al., 2000). Changes in pedagogy during the 1980s and 1990s, from using specially written literacy materials to using literature written for children, has given children's literature new status in the teaching of reading (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2000; Williams, 1999). Included in this approach to literacy are a variety of reading activities. Teacher read aloud and literature circles were the focus of this research.

Teacher Read Aloud

Teachers using a literature-based approach to reading, where children's literature is the text for instruction, structure their classrooms to immerse the students in good literature (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002). Included in the elements of an effective literature-based literacy program, teacher read aloud is considered important and leads to improved student achievement. It is accepted by many researchers, as well as teachers, that reading aloud from a wide selection of well-chosen books helps children learn to love literature (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), and that reading aloud from children's literature should be part of a total literacy instruction program (Stahl, 2003). Indeed, Adams (1990) identified reading aloud as an important means of preparing children for entrance into the

world of literacy. The 1985 U. S. Department of Education *Becoming a Nation of Readers* stated "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 23). It is well established that reading to children supports learning to read.

Reading aloud to children serves multiple purposes. When a teacher reads to the class, students' reading skills are strengthened in at least three areas: vocabulary, comprehension, and decoding (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000).

One benefit of read aloud is the increased vocabulary to which students are exposed. Vocabulary improves when a teacher reads to the students. Children encounter a greater variety of words in books than they will ever hear in spoken conversation or on television (Galda & Cullinan, 2003). Brett, Rothlein, and Hurley (1996) found that when a teacher read aloud to the students and provided explanations of targeted vocabulary words, the experimental group of children learned more words than the control group children. Leung and Pikulski (1990) showed that repeated readings of the same book in teacher read aloud resulted in increased vocabulary acquisition for children in the early elementary grades.

Another reason teachers use read aloud is for the improvement of students' comprehension skills. Reading aloud from children's literature, especially in conjunction with discussion and other activities, can have a positive effect on students' comprehension (Morrow & Asbury, 2003). McKeown and Beck (2003) found that asking questions and discussing the book have proven to be effective strategies in developing comprehension when reading aloud to students.

A third advantage for using teacher read aloud is to improve students' decoding skills. Stahl (2003) explored the effects of reading aloud to children and their acquisition of decoding skills, finding that the decoding aspects of reading relate closely to hearing and seeing text—what happens when a books is read to a child. Stahl concluded that reading aloud to children plays "a small but crucial role in developing children's word recognition skills" (p. 163).

Read aloud is a widely accepted classroom practice. Stone and Twardosz (2001) found that the teachers in the lower elementary grades read aloud to the students at least once a day, with more than half reporting that they have scheduled story time two or three times a day. While teachers read less often to older children, Morrow and Asbury (2003) supported the fact that teachers read aloud to their students in all grades of elementary school.

Literature Circles

With many schools adopting a holistic, integrated approach that focuses on the use of children's literature in reading instruction (Cambourne, 2002), the use of children's books for literacy instruction is encouraged, if not considered necessary. This literature-based approach to reading instruction is defined as using literature that was written for other purposes to teach reading (Harp & Brewer, 2005). Reinforcing this perception, Short (1999) stated that dialoguing and responding to literature are the ways children become literate. Emphasizing the need to include children's literature in literacy instruction, Galda (2001) stated: "Children's literature enhances the language arts curriculum because it provides wonderful models of language used in interesting and

varied ways" (p. 223). Children's literature provides an endless supply of text to enhance literacy instruction.

While children's books present a multitude of opportunities for learning activities, one of the most common uses of children's literature in literacy instruction is in literacy discussion groups where students meet in *literature circles* (Daniels, 1994). In a literature circle, a group of students meet together on a regular basis, with or without the teacher, to discuss previously read text. The expectation is that the children will talk about the things they think are important, issues of concern, or things they do not understand (McGee & Richgels, 2004). Additionally, students use the time to share their own reading strategies, such as how they determined the theme, identified the problem and solution, or remembered important details (Harp & Brewer, 2005). McMahon, Raphael, Goatley, and Pardo (1997) studied the use of literature-based instruction. They suggested that the text for meaningful literacy activities should be children's literature not texts created simply to teach reading.

In a study of student behaviors during peer-led literature group discussions, Evans (2002) found that the text being read had a great impact on the involvement of the participants. She stated "students repeatedly said that reading a 'good' book helped them in their discussions" (p. 58). This implies that the more engaged a student is with the text, the greater the investment in learning. The choice of literature is strongly related to encouraging active student engagement and participation. Because of the importance of literature to the development of young minds and attitudes about books, careful consideration of each book is important. Teachers need to be aware that there are changes taking place in children's literature, such as the increase in quality and variety of

expository books, (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993; Nikolajeva, 1996) as each selects the books that will be used in the classroom for literacy instruction.

Teacher's Choice of Children's Literature

The growth of the children's book market, with net sales reaching nearly $1.3 billion in 1992, is well documented (Shaloo, 1993). With the more than 150,500 children's titles currently in print and 5,000 or more titles being published in the U.S. annually (Bowker, 2000), the decision regarding which books to read is daunting. It is a significant task that has been recognized for many years (Weekes, 1935).

Over one hundred years ago, researchers began studying children's preferences in literature (Sebesta, 2001). While little research is referenced in current journals on which books are chosen for use in the classroom, an important study provided information on the types of books that were being chosen in the 1970s. Poole (1986), as part of his doctoral research, looked into the children's literature British teachers were using in kindergarten through twelfth grade. His survey asked teachers to name the titles and authors of the fiction that the teachers were using as part of their classroom practice. The survey included stories told by the teacher, short stories, novels, excerpts from stories, silent reading, and read aloud by the teacher or students. His findings suggested that teachers tend to read from a small nucleus of very well known or traditional authors. He categorized these books into a core of older classics like *Black Beauty* (Sewell, 1877), newer classics like *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950*)*, and other notable works of modern fiction like *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 1961). Poole described the findings of his study: "The result that one is left with is the general

impression that teachers do not make much use of many writers of quality apart from a chosen few" (p. 174).

The most prominent research on the selection of children's literature chosen for classroom use by elementary teachers focuses on the *selective tradition*, a concept explored by Luke, Cooke, and Luke (1986.) Selective tradition refers to the idea that when a teacher intentionally selects a text, there is a parallel exclusion of other texts. Or in other words, teacher selection of books is a way of culturally shaping the past as well as the present (Williams, 1977).

Luke, Cooke, and Luke (1986) asked university students to select a book to bring to class with only two criteria suggested: first, select a book you like and second, select a book that you think primary schoolchildren would like and benefit from. From the books that were brought to class and the responses the students gave about characters in the story and the plot description, the researchers were able to draw some conclusions about the types of children's books that were being selected as books children might like. Findings include information on stereotyping of male and female characters, author's gender, and multicultural information. The main characters followed stereotypical patterns of behavior. Males authored 32 of the 54 selected pieces, and only two books were chosen whose main characters represented racial minorities. Luke et al. suggested that teachers need to become aware of the unconscious factors that play into the selection of text, and make conscious choices.

Much of the current research on children's literature has centered around what books children prefer to read, while few studies had been conducted that study teacher's choice of literature in relationship to literacy instruction (Sebesta & Monson, 2003). As

exemplified in a more recent study, Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) focused on the "gap" between what is available in schools and student preferences. Their work is important to teachers as they choose children's literature for use in their classrooms because the researchers concluded that the books students like to read are not readily available in the classroom. While this may at first appear as a challenge to educators, Worthy et al. also showed that preferences are not static and that the middle school students in the study value their teacher's recommendations for which books to read. Consequently, it is not suggested that a teacher provide only what students like. Part of the educational process is broadening experiences and fostering new interests as well as providing for student choice (Cullinan, Karrer, & Pillar, 1981; Russell, 1997). However, it is clear that student choice and interests should be critical parts of the book selection process.

Why Teachers Select Books

Galda (2001) suggested that every teacher should be able to answer the question: "Why did I select those particular books that I include in my instruction?" (p. 223). This is important because the books that are selected for use in the classroom will shape the quality of the students' reading experience. Galda continued by stating that there are criteria for selecting the books that are used in the classroom—that a book is selected to achieve the goal of broadening student reading levels and interest. Also, children's books should provide readers with a reason to learn to read and a reason to keep reading. These are important suggestions for teachers to consider when choosing books for classroom use.

A book should be selected thoughtfully with the needs of the students, the curriculum goals, and even the time of year taken into consideration (Russell, 1997; Stewig, 1980). Many literacy experts (Adams, 1998; Galda, 2001; Hillman, 1999; Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1993) suggest considerations for book selection that can be condensed into three criteria: (1) Does the book meet one's internalized criteria—whether or not the book is liked? (2) How does the book compare with other books held in high regard—matching a high standard? (3) Does it meet the purpose and the audience—appropriate for the developmental age of the students?

A teacher's evaluation of a book holds great importance in deciding to use or not use a particular book in the classroom. A book that is a teacher's favorite will be one that is read repeatedly in the classroom (Lukens, 2003). Teachers vary widely in their reading interests, yet some books appeal to most teachers. For instance *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), *Make Way for Ducklings* (McCloskey, (1941), and *The Little House* (Burton, 1942) have lasting charm. Teacher preferences shape the books that are chosen for use in the classroom.

Jipson and Paley (1991) extended of the work of Luke, Cooke, and Luke (1986) by exploring why teachers select certain pieces of children's literature. They developed a questionnaire to elicit information about book choices from teachers that included the titles, the authors, and the main characters of three children's books the teachers had used in their classrooms during the previous year. The teachers stated their reasons for selecting each book for use in the classroom. The questions were constructed to be open-ended to more accurately reflect teacher choice. Questionnaires were collected in the spring of 1988. The teachers selected 155 books, representing 104 authors, with 55%

percent being male. Of the books with identifiable human characters, 80% featured a male main character. The reasons teachers listed for their selection of a book included content, curricular concerns, appropriateness of text, aesthetics, personal preferences, and recognition of gender, race, or ethnicity. Most teachers chose the book for aesthetic reasons or because they were the teacher's personal favorites (45%). Content of the book accounted for 20% of the choices, and 20% of the books were chosen because of the appropriateness of the book for the grade level. Fifteen percent of the books were selected based on the gender, race, or ethnicity of the characters.

Jipson and Paley (1991) concluded that multiple factors must be taken into consideration when choosing children's literature for classroom use, including consideration of children in the classroom, curricular needs, and quality. Their proposal for further research included the suggestion that more research be conducted on a larger population with a more in-depth look at the books that are chosen.

At the same time that using new books may enrich the curriculum, their use may also create a challenge for teachers. To some, teacher selection may appear to be teacher censorship (Galda & Cullinan, 2003). Many of the newly published books explore topics such as racism, oppression, divorce, and gangs, or contain what some would consider objectionable language (Smith, 1997). Because of the unpredictability of the controversy a book may create, a teacher must be able to defend the choices made (Jacobs & Tunnell, 1996) and know why the books were selected for use in the classroom. If not, and books from the *Harry Potter* series (Rowling, 1998) are read to the class, the teacher may be caught off guard by parents for whom fantasy and magic are abhorrent because of their family's religious beliefs. Conversely, not selecting certain types of books creates another

set of problems. McClure (1996) warned that censorship could polarize a community and demoralize teachers. In an increasing pluralistic society the beliefs and ideas a teacher must be sensitive to are almost overwhelming (Galda, 2001). Hillman (1999) focuses on professionals' judgment of what literature is worthy of children and their classroom time. He notes that careful consideration of why a teacher chooses a text is an important aspect of text selection.

Categories of Children's Literature

Another important consideration for choosing appropriate materials for readers are genre and text format features (Rasinski & Padak, 1996). Children's literature books can be classified in a variety of ways (Lukens, 2003). The most common way of organizing children's literature is by genres which, when applied to children's literature, means classifying a book according to literary content (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004). Genres include, but are not limited to, poetry or prose, realism or fantasy, and fiction or nonfiction (Lukens, 2003). While the many genres of children's literature provide an insight into the characteristics of a book, for the purpose of this study, the classifications of fiction and nonfiction provided appropriate information.

Fiction books rely upon the author's imagination, while nonfiction books contain information that can be documented. Fiction books include those books that have realistic (could happen) or fantasy (deviates from natural law) elements in the story. Nonfiction children's literature includes books that are informational or biographical (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004).

While fiction is the dominant choice of children's literature in the classroom (Duke, 2000; Trabasso, 1994), a teacher's motivation for including nonfiction children's

literature in the elementary classroom may include a variety of purposes. Using nonfiction books in the classroom gives the teacher opportunities to integrate the information found in books into the real world (Camp, 2000). Students can read about subjects in which they have an interest (Palmer & Stewart, 2003). Teachers who use a variety of nonfiction books could explore a broad range of topics while applying critical reading skills that facilitate meaningful discussions (Snowball, 1995). Nonfiction books can add life to the same content that can be unappealing and technical in textbooks (Moss, 1991).

Another way of classifying children's literature books is by their format, such as the difference in format between picture books and chapter books. Picture books use illustrations and text to tell the story or teach the content (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004), while chapter books refer to books that are "long enough to be divided into chapters" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 28). These two formats—picture and chapter—were used to categorize books in this study.

Traditionally, picture books are used with younger children (Giorgis & Johnson, 2001), however, some teachers are recognizing the important role that picture books can have in a classroom of older students to enhance content area instruction, enjoyment, vocabulary, and learning about conventions. Bloem and Padak (1996) discussed the reasons to use picture books for literacy instruction. Those reasons included (1) that reading a picture book requires a short period of instruction time, (2) that picture books employ double media—print and illustration—facilitating comprehension, (3) that picture books are widely available through school and public libraries and (4) that the complex theme of some picture books such as in *Anno's Journey* (Anno, 1992), *The Wall*

(Bunting, 1990), and *Grandfather's Journey* (Say, 1993) are appropriate for older students. Chamberlain and Leal (1999) evaluated the readability levels of the Caldecott Medal-winning books. They found the overall grade-level readability average for the books was 4.75 and covered all reading levels for the elementary grades. Picture books can be complex and sophisticated, useful for eliciting thoughtful discussion and speculation in upper grade literacy instruction. As Newkirk (1992) stated,

> Complexity, after all, is not simply (or even primarily) a mechanical matter of word length and clause length, numbers that can be fed into readability formulas. The possibility for discussion arises when there are *gaps* in the text, indeterminacies that a reader must resolve. (p. 14)

Clearly, there is a place for variety in the classroom as teachers select the children's literature books for use in the classroom.

How Do Teachers Find Out About Books

It is generally accepted that literature written expressly for children and from their point of view did not fully emerge until the eighteenth century. John Newbery was one of the first to write, print, and sell books especially for children (Georgiou, 1969). Since then, many books have been written and published resulting in an abundance of literature from which to choose. In the past, a teacher had to rely on his or her own "individual good sense" (Smith, 1997) when choosing children's literature for their classrooms. More recently a variety of avenues for locating desirable children's literature are available and teachers have many resources that could potentially guide them in their search for appropriate children's books.

One of the most effective ways to assess the quality of a children's book is through a review of children's literature awards (Allen, 1998). While there are currently several hundred awards recognized in the United States and many more throughout the world, the American Library Association (ALA) sponsors several prestigious awards worth noting (Zeece, 1999).

The Newbery Medal, starting in 1922, was the first children's book award in the world. Criteria for the award specify accuracy, clarity, style, and organization as important elements. Additionally, the theme, development of the plot, characterization, and setting are judged for quality. Typically Newbery Medal books are appropriate for older children, or as teacher read alouds. Finalists for the award are called Newbery Honor Books (Zeece, 1999).

The Caldecott Medal honors are given to books that show excellence in artistic technique and pictorial interpretation. Appropriateness and delineation of plot, theme, setting, mood, or information portrayed in the illustrations is also considered. This award was established in 1937 (Zeece, 1999).

The ALA additionally confers the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award on authors who have made a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children. The award was first given in 1954, and was presented every five years from 1960 to 1980. Currently, the award is given every three years (Zeece, 1999).

Other notable awards include the Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards, the Coretta Scott King award, the Scott O'Dell award, and the National Council for Teachers of English Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. In the field of non-fiction, the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children, the Robert F. Sibert Award,

and the annual list of the Outstanding Science Trade Books for Children are given to books that reflect quality factual information (Zeece, 1999). Each of these awards recognizes children's books that have been judged to have outstanding and enduring value in the field of literature.

Other awards are based not on quality but on popularity. The most accessible and useful of these are state awards where school children vote for their favorite book from a list circulated throughout the state. At present 47 states have a book award program where the children themselves select the winners. Those titles are proven favorites with young readers (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004).

In addition to awards and honors, teachers can access information about books through reviews and lists of children's literature. Currently, most children's books are subject to review for quality, appeal, and value. The National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, and the American Library Association have statements that guide teachers in the book selections and publish annual lists of best books. Reviews of books are available to educators through book review journals such as *The Horn Book Magazine, The Reading Teacher, Booklist,* and *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. Many public and school libraries provide lists of suggested books for children. Children's authors list books that are recommended reading. In addition to authors, other famous people endorse books for children to read, including Oprah who posts a Kids Reading List (Harpo, 2006). Sebesta (2001) expanded the ways teachers can find reviews of children's literature to include college texts, such as *Literature and the Child* (Cullinan & Galda, 2005), *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Norton & Norton, 2002), or *Children's Literature, Briefly* (Jacobs

& Tunnell, 2004).

Galda (2001) lists other ways that teachers find out about good books. One avenue for teachers to learn more about children's literature is through college courses or workshops. Most teacher preparation programs provide classes that focus on children's literature. Additionally, teacher in-service classes often provide lists of books that could be used for literacy instruction based on certain comprehension or decoding skills, or books that correlate with content areas.

Teachers can access a wide variety of information about books through computerized databases and the Internet (Galda & Cullinan, 2003). Websites created for, and by, educators suggest texts appropriate for particular lessons. Yokosta and Mingshui (2002) list a variety of websites that are available for teacher use when selecting children's literature. Included in their list are *Children's Literature: Beyond Basal* (http://www.beyondbasics.com/) *Children's Literature Web Guide* (http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/-dkbrown/index.html), and *Fair Rosa Cyber Library of Children's Literature* (http://wwwdalton.org/libraries/fairrosa). In addition to lists of books, other websites include considerable information on how to use children's literature in the classroom, with recommended books often listed as resources (e.g., Raphael & Hiebert, 1996; Tompkins, 2003).

Teachers have many sources for support in the selection and use of children's literature, and it is clear that there is ample information on each piece of published literature a teacher may choose to use. However, missing from the plentiful research on children's literature are the elements that reflect which of these methods teachers use to find out about, and ultimately select, the books they use in their classrooms.

Additional Studies on Teacher Selection of Children's Literature

Stone and Twardosz (2001) studied the importance of the teacher's role in selecting, reading, and making accessible high-quality children's books in a childcare environment. Twenty-one teachers of four-year-old children from a random sampling of 21 childcare centers participated in the study. They used interviews, questionnaires, booklists, and observations as their means of data collection. While they found wide variability across the classrooms in the literacy opportunities afforded the children, more than half the books teachers reported using during group story time had been recommended for literary quality by children's literature review publications.

Another relevant study on teachers' selection of children's literature not included in refereed journals was a dissertation. The focus for this study centered on the picture books that were being chosen for use with young children. Adams (1998) looked at the factors that influence kindergarten teachers' selection of children's literature books for use in reading aloud in their classrooms. The participants were six kindergarten teachers with varying years of teaching experience. Data were collected through interviews, focused book reviews, and think alouds (Hoffman, Roser & Battle, 1993). Adams found that all six teachers in her sample used teacher read aloud as part of their instructional strategies. They listed a variety of factors that influenced the teachers' choices of children's books. Those factors were divided into the categories of (a) purpose for reading, (b) students' needs and desires, (c) characteristics of books themselves, (d) the potential to enhance literacy growth, and (e) issues of controversy. The participants also indicated that they used the books with a variety of pre-reading, during reading, and post

reading strategies. She concluded that these kindergarten teachers recognize the importance of reading aloud and that they carefully consider which books to use.

Summary

Given the findings and recommendations for further research from previous studies, it became clear that the use of children's literature in public school classrooms for literacy instruction warrants more study. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to collect and analyze a listing of the children's literature books being used in classroom literacy instruction in Central School District in grades four through six. This study sought to answer the following questions: (a) Which children's literature books did teachers choose for use in upper elementary grade classrooms, for both teacher read aloud and literature circles? (b) Why did the teachers select those books? (c) How did the teachers find out about the children's literature titles they selected?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to provide a descriptive analysis of the children's literature used for teacher read aloud and literature circles in grades four through six in Central School District. Consequently, this quantitative study focused on answering three questions: (a) Which children's literature books did teachers choose for use in upper elementary grade classrooms, for both teacher read aloud and literature circles? (b) Why did the teachers select those books? (c) How did the teachers find out about the children's literature titles they selected? Data to answer these questions were collected through a self-reporting survey completed by classroom reading teachers in grades four through six in Central School District.

Participants

The participants for this study were teachers from Central School District. Central School District was chosen because it is a small district with only thirteen elementary schools. More importantly, the teacher population, as part of a district-wide literacy program, was expected to use children's literature for literacy instruction. Each elementary teacher in this district had been trained on the framework of balanced literacy using the Comprehensive Early Literacy Learning/Extended Literacy Learning (CeLL/ExLL). As a result of this training, teachers were working toward a common understanding of the aspects of read aloud and literature groups that may have assisted them in completing the surveys. It was anticipated that each teacher used read aloud and literature groups on a regular basis for literacy instruction and, as suggested by

Afflerbach (2002) to improve the validity of the sampling, the subjects in this study were familiar with the terms children's literature, literature circles and read aloud as used in the survey.

All classroom teachers in grades four through six from Central School District, 115 teachers, were invited to be included in this study through individual school visits by the researcher, or as in the case of two schools, through the school principal asking the teachers to participate. Each teacher was given information about the study (see Appendix C) when asked to participate. Completed surveys from the entire population of Central School District teachers of grade four through six was desired; however, actual participants were those teachers who chose to participate. Thus the research was limited to the fifteen teachers who were willing to share their classroom information. This represented 13% of the total teacher population eligible to participate. While the number of participants was small, the sample teacher's comments generated confidence that the surveys completed accurately represented the children's literature used in those classrooms for teacher read aloud and literature circles during the school year in which the research was conducted.

The district office personnel director provided a complete list of fourth through sixth grade teachers to ensure that all members of the target population had a chance to be sampled (American Association for Public Opinion Research [AAPOR], 2003). The teachers who chose to participate were representative of Central School District's teacher population in grades four through six. The teacher sample included both male and female teachers and teachers with varying years of teaching experience (see Table 1). To

Table 1

Teacher Demographics

Grade Level	Gender	# of Surveys	Years Taught	Literature In College	Degree Held	# of books school owned	# of books personal	Title 1 School
4	M	19	1	BYU	BS	25	75	Y
4	F	9	5	BYU	BS	100	300	Y
4	F	55	10	Rick's College/ Carthage	BA/ Literacy Endors-ment	250	750	Y
4	F	23	18	BYU	BS	20	100	N
4	F	13	2	BYU	BS	50	150	Y
5	F	28	7	BYU	BS/ Gifted Endors-ment	50	150	N
5	F	8	1	BYU	BS	200	300	Y
6	F	34	1	BYU	BS	0	100	N
6	F	9	23	BYU	BS	300	700	N
6	M	27	15	Cal State	MA	0	200	Y
6	F	29	10	Weber State	MA	30	350	Y
6	F	21	10	BYU	MA	40	160	N
6	F	30	11	BYU/SU U	MA	0	150	N
6	F	12	1	BYU	BS	70	160	N
6	F	13	5	BYU	BS	70	150	N

enhance the understanding of who the participants were, included in the table was information on the college where the teacher received training in children's literature, the number of books each teacher had in the classroom, both personal and school owned, and whether or not the school received Title 1 funding.

Measures

The data source for this research was one self-report survey completed by the classroom teachers for each book read in (1) teacher read aloud or (2) literature discussion groups during the 2005-2006 school year (see Appendix A). This was a primary data source for obtaining the information. The survey consisted of five questions. It was written to take into consideration teachers' time constraints by allowing the responder to answer most questions with a check mark. Although the survey consisted of predetermined responses, teachers were also allowed to respond to a question by checking the "other" box and filling in their own information. A teacher-tracking document was used to collect demographical information on each teacher (see Appendix B).

The survey was field tested at one school in a neighboring district by five teachers for three books each teacher has used in the classroom. This was done to confirm that teachers were able to understand the questions and responses listed, and to assess the amount of time required to complete the survey (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2003). As suggested by the field test participants, some questions were adjusted to make them more understandable.

Procedures

Teachers in Central School District who agreed to participate completed a survey sheet for each children's literature book they used for literacy instruction in literature circles or read aloud during the 2005-2006 school year. After identifying the title, author, and literacy activity, the teacher responded to closed-response questions that addressed why the book was initially chosen and how the teacher learned about that text. These surveys were collected two times during the school year—December and April—with the teachers filling out surveys for which books they anticipated using during May.

The surveys were given to teachers in October through personal visits to each of the schools. A location was established at each of the schools where teachers would put the surveys once they are completed. The surveys were grouped by teacher and by school during the collection phase of the research project. During the last week of April, check backs were made to those teachers who had not completed the surveys by the end of March due date. As some of the teachers had not completed surveys but were willing to do them, they were given an option to have their classes covered while they completed the surveys. This facilitated data collection and may have been a strategy used earlier in the study to encourage more teachers to participate.

The fifteen teachers who were included in the study provided what they felt was complete information. No teachers were included in the analysis that did not include surveys for books they had used for teacher read aloud and literature circles during the entire school year. Additionally, no new data were included in the study after April 28th, 2006.

Data Analysis

This study required a descriptive analysis summarizing the characteristics of the information collected in the surveys. First, a frequency chart was made that included a listing of the children's literature titles used in the fourth through sixth grade classrooms. The number of times each text was listed was counted, tallied, and the information summarized.

For questions two and three, the responses were converted into numbers for analysis. The responses were given a number based on the position held in the survey, creating nominal categories. The frequency with which an answer occurred was counted to see how many respondents were in each category. In some instances, the absolute numbers were converted to percentages for ease of understanding. Patterns or trends in the data were found that would answer the research questions. The data were summarized and the frequencies presented in a graphical form (Blaikie, 2003). A fellow student conducted checks for accuracy in calculation.

This univariate descriptive analysis was conducted in relationship to the three research questions: (a) Which children's literature books did teachers choose for use in upper elementary grade classrooms, for both teacher read aloud and literature circles? (b) Why did the teachers select those books? (c) How did the teachers find out about the children's literature titles they selected?

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the children's literature that fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers in Central School District used in their classrooms for read aloud and literature circles as part of their literacy instruction. The research was based on analyzing the responses teachers gave to survey questions for these three questions, (a) Which children's literature books did teachers choose for use in upper elementary grade classrooms, for both teacher read aloud and literature circles? (b) Why did the teachers select those books? (c) How did the teachers find out about the children's literature titles they selected?

Which Books did Teachers Choose

The thirteen teachers completed 330 surveys on books used for teacher read aloud and literature circles (see Table 2). Thirty-seven percent (f =120) of the books listed on the surveys were used for teacher read loud, while 63% (f = 210) of the books were used for literature circles. From the list of the 330 books for which the teachers completed surveys, 228 different titles were represented.

Several books were used in more than one classroom. The most frequently chosen included: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (f = 9; Lewis, 1950) and *Number the Stars* (f = 5; Lowry, 1989) used for both teacher read aloud and as a text for literature circles; *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (f = 6; Konigsburg, 1967), *The Phantom Tollbooth* (f = 6; Norton, 1929), and *The Devil's Arithmetic* (f = 5; Yolen, 1988) were used for literature circles only.

Table 2 (continued)

Children's Literature from Surveys

Title	Author	Literacy Activity 1=read aloud 2=literature circle	*f*
100 Dresses	Estes	1	1
100th Day Worries	Cuylor	1	1
Fourth Grade Rats	Spinelli	2	1
A Christmas Carol	Dickens	1, 2	1
A Christmas Sonata	Paulsen	2	1
A Family Apart	Nixon	1	1
A long Way From Chicago	Peck	2	1
A Single Shard	Park	2	2
A Year Down Yonder	Peck	2	1
Adventures of Tom Sawyer	Twain	2	1
Alice in Wonderland	Carroll	2	1
Among the Hidden	Haddix	1, 2	3
Animal Farm	Orwell	1	2
Animal Planet	Hammerslough	2	1
Animorphs: The Capture	Applegate	2	1
Anne of Green Gables	Montgomery	2	1
Anybodies	Bode	1	1
Artemis Fowl	Colfer	2	1
Auntie Clause	Primavera	1	1
Awesome Egypt	Deary	2	3
Baby	MacLachan	2	1
Bad Case of the Stripes	Shannon	1	1
Beatrice's Goat	McBrier	1	1
Beauty	McKinley	2	1
Because of Winn Dixie	DiCamillo	2	1
Best Christmas Pageant Ever	Robinson	1	2
Big Pumpkin	Silvermann	1	1
Bigfoot Cinderella	Johnston	1	1
Bless us All	Rylant	1	1
Boxcar Children	Warner	2	1
Boys Start the War	Naylor	1	3
Breadwinner	Ellis	2	1
Brian's Hunt	Paulsen	2	1
Brian's Winter	Paulsen	2	1
Bridge to Terabithia	Paterson	2	1
Bronze Bow	Speare	2	1
Bunnicula	Howe	2	2
Class Clown	Hurwitz	2	1

Table 2 (continued)

Children's Literature from Surveys

Title	Author	Literacy Activity 1=read aloud 2=literature circle	*f*
Castle in the Attic	Winthrop	2	3
Caught in the Act	Nixon	1	1
Cay	Taylor	1	1
Children of the Lamp	Kerr	2	1
Chocolate Fever	Smith	1	1
Chocolatina	Kraft	1	1
City of Ember	Du Prau	1	1
Clever Tom & the Leprechaun	Shute	1	1
Dangerous Island	Midlin	1	1
Dark is Rising	Cooper	2	2
Deadly Dungeon	Roy	2	1
Deadly Power of Medusa	Osborne	1	1
Deserts	Simon	1	1
Detectives in Togas	Winterfield	2	3
Devil's Arithmetic	Yolen	2	5
Diary of a Spider	Cronin	1	1
Diggingest Dogg	Seuss	1	1
Dinorella	Edwards	1	1
Double Fudge	Blume	1	1
Dr. Seuss	Morgan	2	1
Earthquake	Bolt	2	1
Elmer and the Dragon	Gannett	2	1
Emily's Runaway Imagination	Cleary	2	1
Encyclopedia Brown Takes the Case	Sobol	2	1
Ender's Game	Card	1	1
Endless Steppe	Hautzig	2	1
Enormous Egg	Butterworth	2	1
Eragon	Paolini	2	1
Esperanza Rising	Ryan	2	4
Everybody Needs a Rock	Baylor	1	1
Everything on a Waffle	Horrath	2	2
Fairy Rebel	Banks	2	1
Favorite Greek Myths	Osborne	2	3
Five Great Explorers	Hudson	2	1
Fog Magic	Sauer	2	1
Forgotten Door	Key	2	1
Fossils, Rocks & Minerals	Pellant	1	1
Foxman	Paulsen	1	1

Table 2 (continued)

Children's Literature from Surveys

Title	Author	Literacy Activity 1=read aloud 2=literature circle	*f*
Frindle	Clements	2	1
From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler	Konigsburg	2	6
Girls Get Even	Naylor	1	2
Giver	Lowry	2	2
Gone Away Lake	Enright	2	1
Green Eggs & Ham	Seuss	1	1
Gregor the Overlander	Collins	1	1
Half Magic	Eager	1	1
Hatchet	Paulsen	2	2
Hatching Magic	Downer	1	2
Help! I'm a Prisoner in the Library	Clifford	2	1
Holes	Sacher	2	2
Hope's Crossing	Goodman	2	1
Horton Hears a Who	Seuss	1	1
House on Hackman's Hill	Nixon	1	1
How the Grinch Stole Christmas	Suess	1	1
How Do Animals Adapt	Kalman	1	1
How Much is a Million	Schwartz	1	1
How to Behave and Why	Leaf	1	1
Hugh Glass: Mountain Man	McClung	1	1
I am David	Holm	1	2
I Love You the Purplest	Joose	1	1
I'll Meet You at the Cucumbers	Moore	2	1
In the Face of Danger	Nixon	1	1
Indian Captive	Leuski	2	1
Island of the Blue Dolphin	O'Dell	2	1
Island of the Aunts	Ibbotson	1, 2	3
Jackaroo	Voigt	2	1
Jackie Robinson	Gomez	2	1
Judy Moody Gets Famous	McDonald	2	1
Justin and the Best Biscuits	Walter	2	1
King Arthur	Pyle	2	1
King Looie Katz	Seuss	1	1
King of the Wind	Henry	2	1
Kiteman and Karanga	Reynolds	1	1
Knight at Dawn	Osborne	2	3
Knight Who was Afraid of the Dark	Hazen	2	1

Table 2 (continued)

Children's Literature from Surveys

Title	Author	Literacy Activity 1=read aloud 2=literature circle	*f*
Knights and Castles	Hindley	2	3
Knights of the Kitchen Table	Scieszka	2	3
Knights of the Round Table	Gross	2	3
Korean Cinderella	Climo	1	1
Legend of Old Befana	DePaola	1	1
Legend of Sleepy Hallow	Irving	2	1
Leon and the Spitting Image	Kurwell	1	1
Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe	Lewis	1, 2	9
Lost and Found Game	Nagar	2	1
Lottery Rose	Hunt	2	3
Lucky the Leprechaun Goes to School	Dillon	1	1
Magic Tree Series	Osborne	2	1
Manners Can Be Fun	Leaf	1	1
Matilda Bone	Cushman	2	1
Maze	Hobbs	2	1
McBroom Tells a Lie	Fleischman	2	1
Midnight Children	Rushdie	2	1
Miracle on 34th Street	Davis	1	1
Monster's Ring	Coville	1	1
More Stories Julia Tells	Cameron	2	1
Mountains	Simon	1	1
Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH	O'Brien	2	2
Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle	McDonald	2	1
My Teacher is an Alien	Coville	1	3
Mystery on October Road	Cragin	2	1
Navajo Long Walk	Armstrong	2	1
Night of the Twisters	Ruckman	2	1
Number the Stars	Lowry	1, 2	5
Nutty for President	Hughes	2	1
Odysseus in the Serpent Maze	Yolen	1	1
Once Upon a Poem	Holland	1	1
One Grain of Rice	Demi	1	1
Over Sea, Under Stone	Cooper	2	3
Owen	Henkes	1	1
Owl in the Shower	George	2	1
Owls in the Family	Mowat	2	2
P. S. Longer Letter Later	Danziger	2	1
People of Sparks	DuPrau	1	1

Table 2 (continued)

Children's Literature from Surveys

Title	Author	Literacy Activity 1=read aloud 2=literature circle	*f*
Peppermints in the Parlor	Wallace	1	1
Phantom Tollbooth	Juster	2	6
Pictures of Hollis Woods	Giff	1	1
Pompeii	Harris	2	1
Prince Caspean	Lewis	1	1
Princess Bride	Goldman	1	3
Quilt Maker's Gift	Brumbeau	1	1
Rabbit Hill	Lawson	2	1
Redwall	Jacques	2	1
Rest of the Story	Harvey	2	1
River	Paulsen	2	4
Rocks	Wellford	2	1
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	Taylor	2	1
Sadako and the 1,000 Paper Cranes	Coerr	1	1
Saint George and the Dragon	Hodges	2	1
Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief	Van Draanen	1	1
Say Cheese Medusa	McMullan	1	1
Secret of NIMH	O'Brien	2	1
Secret of Platform Thirteen	Ibbotson	1	1
Secret School	Avi	2	2
Shadows in the Garden	Rushby	2	1
Shark	MacQuitty	2	1
Sherlock Holmes	Doyle	1	1
Sign of the Beaver	Speare	2	1
Silver Crown	O'Brien	1	1
Sir Cumference and the First Round Table	Neuschwander	1	2
Small Steps	Sachar	1	1
Snakes	Corwin	2	1
Snow Bright and the Tooth Fairy	Condon	2	1
Snow Treasure	McSwigan	2	3
So Far From the Bamboo Grove	Watkins	2	2
St. Patrick's Day in the Morning	Bunting	1	1
Starting School with an Enemy	Carbone	2	1
Staying Nine	Conrad	2	1
Stuart Little	White	2	1
Summer of My German Soldier	Greene	2	3
Super Fudge	Blume	2	2
Surviving the Applewhites	Tolan	2	1

Table 2 (continued)

Children's Literature from Surveys

Title	Author	Literacy Activity 1=read aloud 2=literature circle	*f*
Tackylocks	Lester	1	1
Taeber Hermit	Roth	2	1
Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing	Blume	1	3
Tales of King Arthur	Brooks	2	3
Thief Lord	Funk	2	2
Thirteenth Floor	Fleischman	2	1
This Island Isn't Big Enough for the Two of Us	Clifford	2	1
Thunder Cave	Smith	2	1
Time Bike	Langton	2	1
Titanic: Lost and Found	Donnelly	2	1
Tornadoes	Simon	1, 2	2
Train of States	Sis	1	1
True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle	Avi	1, 2	2
True Story of the Three Little Pigs	Scieszka	1	1
Tuck Everlasting	Babbit	2	2
Twenty and Ten	Bishop	2	2
Ugly Princess and Wise Fool	Gray	2	1
Utah Indians	Marsh	1	1
Volcanoes	Simon	2	1
Wagon Wheels	Marsh	2	1
Wait Till Helen Comes	Hahn	1	1
Walk Two Moons	Creech	1, 2	3
Wanderer	Creech	2	2
War with Grandpa	Smith	1, 2	2
Water Dance	Locker	1	1
Westing Game	Raskin	2	2
Where the Red Fern Grows	Rawls	1	1
White Mountains	Christopher	1, 2	3
Widow's Broom	Van Allsburg	1	1
Wishes, Kisses and Pigs	Hearne	2	1
Witches	Dahl	1, 2	2
Wolf who Cried Boy	Hartman	1	1
World of King Arthur	Holland	2	1
Wringer	Spinelli	2	1
Wrinkle in Time	L'Engle	1, 2	4
Yay, You	Boynton	1, 2	1

In addition to books that were used frequently, books by a particular author were chosen more than once. C. S. Lewis (*f* = 10), Gary Paulsen (*f* =10*)*, Mary Pope Osborne (*f* = 8), and Lois Lowry (*f* = 7) were the authors whose books were most often selected. Included in the 330 completed surveys were both fiction and nonfiction. Picture books and chapter books were also included (See Table 3).

Table 3

Types of Books Listed in Surveys

	Chapter Books		Picture Books		Total of 330	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Fiction	268	81.2	36	10.9	304	92.1
Nonfiction:						
Science	5	1.5	5	1.5	10	3.0
Social Studies	8	2.4	2	0.6	10	3.0
Mathematics	0	0.0	2	0.6	2	0.6
Biographies	4	1.2	0	0.0	4	1.2
n	285	86.3	45	13.6	330	100.0

As well as the difference in variety of children's literature books used for literacy in each classroom, the teachers differed in the number of books they used in their classrooms for literacy instruction. One teacher stated that eight books had been used, while another teacher completed surveys for 55 books.

Why Books Were Chosen

The teachers who completed the survey were allowed to choose more than one reason why they decided to use a certain book. Each teacher generally chose more than one criterion for selecting a book to use in the classroom for literacy instruction (see Table 4).

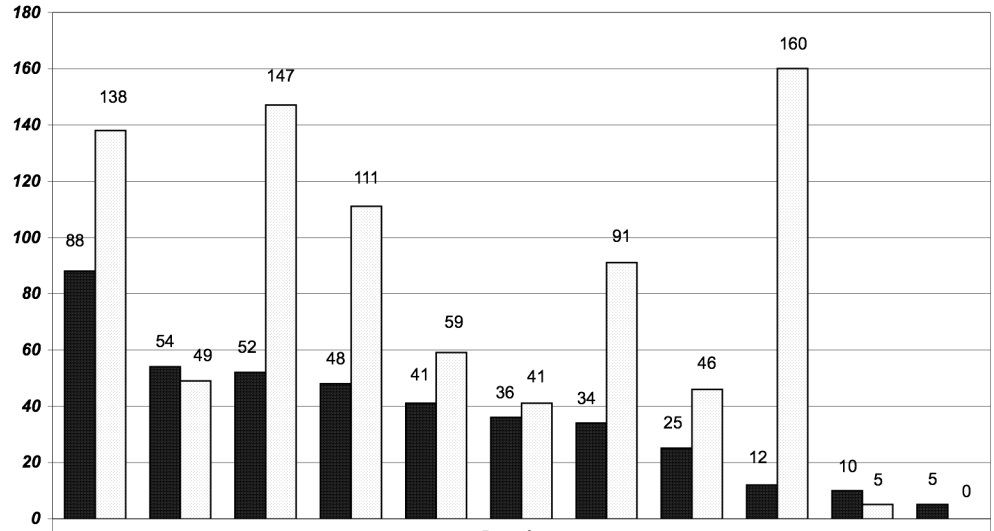
Table 4

Distribution by Choice (Table)

	Teacher Read Aloud		Literature Circles	
	f	%	*f*	%
Students Like	88	21.7	138	16.3
Teacher's Favorite	54	13.3	49	5.7
Comprehension/skill Instruction	52	12.8	147	17.3
Topic Appropriate for Age	48	11.9	111	13.1
Teaches Moral or Lesson	41	10.1	59	6.9
Introduces Concept	36	8.8	41	4.8
Integrates Curriculum	34	8.3	91	10.7
Quality Literature	25	6.2	46	5.4
Students' Reading Level	12	2.9	160	18.9
Other	10	2.4	5	.6
No response	5	1.2	0	0
n	405	100.0	847	100.0

Although 330 surveys were collected, there were 1,252 responses for the survey question relating to why books were chosen, with the mean number of responses for each category being 3.7. Fifteen percent of the books had one response, 15% of the books had two responses, and 70% of the books had three or more responses listed as to why the book was chosen.

The information gathered was separated by how the books were used in the classroom—teacher read aloud or literature circles—to better answer the research questions. The number of responses is shown for each category. For comparison purposes, the information was also combined and displayed in graph form (see Figure 1).



	Student Like	Teacher Favorite	Teach a Skill	Age Level	Moral or lesson	Introduce a Concept	Integrate	Quality	Reading Level	Other	No Data
Read Aloud	88	54	52	48	41	36	34	25	12	10	5
Literature Circles	138	49	147	111	59	41	91	46	160	5	0

Figure 1. Distribution by choice (graph).

How Teachers Found Out About Books

Teachers were asked to choose a primary way of finding out about a book (see Table 5). The responses suggested that one of the main avenues teachers used for learning about a book was by looking in the school guided reading library (*f* =95). However, the contents of the school guided reading library influenced teachers' choice on which books to use for literature circles (*f* =94), while the guided reading library had little impact (*f* = 1) on which books were chosen for teacher read aloud. Other teacher recommendations (*f* = 68) also influenced teacher book selection for the books used for both teacher read aloud (*f* = 32) and literature circles (*f* = 36). For the choice 'other' (*f* = 25), the teachers listed a variety of ways they had encountered the book. Some listed that they had received the book as a gift (*f* =5), that the book was a sequel to another book they had read (*f* = 2), that the book had been found in a bookstore or library (*f* =10), or that it was recommended by a parent or student (*f* = 7), and one book was chosen because the teacher had seen a movie based on the book (*f* =1).

Summary

The results show wide variability in the use of children's literature in the sample teachers' classroom reading instruction. The teacher's choices impacted the amount of books and the kinds of children's literature books that were used in the classroom for read aloud or literature circles.

The teachers who completed the survey validated their children's literature choices by listing more than one reason for choosing each book. Whether or not the teacher felt the students would like a book played the most important part in the teacher's decisions. The comprehension and skills instruction needs, and ability level of the

students were also important considerations for this sample population. Additionally, the data suggested that the teachers found out about the majority of books they use through a few main sources, while not accessing others as frequently. The data suggested that a teacher often chose a book that was in the guided reading library or was recommended by another teacher.

Table 5

Distribution by Method

	Teacher Read Aloud		Literature Circles	
	f	%	*f*	%
Recommended by Another Teacher	32	26.7	36	17.1
Other	19	15.8	6	2.9
Teacher Favorite as a Child Reader	14	11.6	11	5.2
From an In-service Training	13	10.8	0	0.0
Teacher Favorite as an Adult Reader	12	10.0	9	4.3
Book Club Offer (i.e. Scholastic, Arrow)	12	10.0	5	2.4
Recommended by Librarian	6	5.0	1	0.5
Recommended by Literacy Specialist	3	2.5	2	1.0
Classroom Set	2	1.7	39	18.6
Recommended or Award Books (i. e. Newberry, Horn Book)	2	1.7	0	0.0
Recommended by Pre-service training class (i.e. University Professor, text)	1	0.8	4	1.9
Found in School Guided Reading	1	0.8	94	44.8
Library				
Printed or On-line Book Review	0	0.0	0	0.0
Website (i.e. posted lesson plan)	0	0.0	1	0.5
No response	3	2.5	2	1.0
n	120	100.0	210	100.0

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this study was to explore the children's literature that is used in grades four through six classrooms for literacy instruction in Central School District. Teachers in those classrooms were asked to complete a survey for each of the children's literature books they used for teacher read aloud and literature circles. Their responses to three questions were analyzed to better understand the use of children's literature in the classroom: (a) Which children's literature books did teachers choose for use in upper elementary grade classrooms, for both teacher read aloud and literature circles? (b) Why did the teachers select those books? (c) How did the teachers find out about the children's literature titles they selected?

Question 1

As the data for the first question—which children's literature books did teachers choose for use in grades four through six for teacher read aloud and literature circles—were analyzed, several patterns emerged. First, the students in the sample classrooms read, or had read to them, a varying number a books. Second, some books were used in more than one classroom and one book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,* was chosen more than any other book. Third, picture and nonfiction books were chosen less often than fiction books that had chapter book formats.

Variability of children's literature in the classrooms. Information from the surveys showed that one teacher used eight children's literature books in the classroom

for read aloud and literature circles, while another teacher used 55, illustrating the wide variability of children's literature use in the sample classrooms. Thus, some students had a wider access to children's literature than others within the same school district. This may impact the quality of education for those students whose teacher used few children's books for teacher read aloud and literature circles because children's literature is an important tool for literacy instruction, supporting vocabulary development, comprehension and decoding skills.

The value of using children's literature in the classroom is not limited to literacy gains. Howard (2005) wrote, "books can be a vital force in molding the lives of those who read" (p. 1). Children can learn about the world and their connection to it through children's literature. Children's literature offers students insight into their own thinking and feelings. Reading children's literature can have an impact on students' attitudes towards the content area subjects, such as mathematics and social studies.

Lukens (2003) summed up the value of children's literature, "at its best [it] gives both pleasure and understanding. It explores the nature of human beings, the condition of humankind" (p. 9). Surely, all students deserve the opportunity to have a large quantity of children's literature used in their classrooms as part of their literacy education, a concept that was not evidenced in each classroom surveyed in this study.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. While several teachers chose some of the same books, one book was used in over half of the respondents' classrooms, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950). Since its publication, this classic, the first in a seven book series, has never been out of print. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, considered "timeless and treasured" (Livingston & Kurkjian, 2003, p. 98), follows four

children through a magic closet into the magic kingdom of Narnia. What makes this book uniquely interesting in this study is that the movie adaptation of the book was released during the school year the study was conducted. What impact a movie release has on a book is yet to be explored; however, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was listed on the *New York Times* Best Seller list in November, 2005, prior to the movie's release in theaters in December, and it was read in more sample teacher's classrooms than any other book.

Nonfiction and picture books. Data from the study showed that far fewer nonfiction books were chosen than fiction books and that picture books were seldom chosen for use in the upper grades for teacher read aloud or literature circles. The sample teachers had limited their use of children's literature to mostly fictional chapter books. While fictional chapter books are certainly appropriate for literacy instruction, there are many reasons to use a wider variety of children's literature for teacher read aloud and literature circles. Nonfiction books can add variety and generate interesting in content area subjects. The data suggested the sample teachers are not taking advantage of this opportunity very often, even though nonfiction is published on a wide range of topics, with engaging formats and illustrations and for a variety of reading levels.

Palmer and Stewart (2003) found that teachers may not be aware of the number of quality nonfiction available and suggested that curriculum directors, staff development specialists, reading specialists, and building administrators may want to develop ways to keep busy classroom teachers informed of the nonfiction children's literature that is appropriate and available for individual grade levels. This may hold true for the participants of this study.

Of the 330 books for which sample teachers completed surveys, 45 were indicated as picture books. As evidenced by the data, the teachers in this study used picture books for read aloud and literature circles infrequently, indicating that the students did not have the advantages of literacy instruction with picture books used as the text.

Question 2

The data for question two—why did the teachers pick those books—showed that the teachers selected books for a variety of reasons. The reason most often chosen when the responses were combined for teacher read aloud and literature circles was that the teacher thought the students would like the book. This is an important aspect of student motivation to read a book. The sample teachers demonstrated through their responses that it was important to them to choose books based on student interest.

The sample teachers also considered the students' reading level and the skills that needed to be taught. This was more evident when the book was used for literature circles. This stands to reason because one of the main concepts of the CELL/ExLL program is that the books used for small group instruction are at the student's instructional level of reading. Choosing books that were leveled according to difficulty for literature circles may have limited the books students read and this may not be the best way to encourage lifelong reading habits.

Question 3

In relationship to the third question—how did the teachers find out about the children's literature titles they select—one theme of particular interest emerged in the sample teachers' use of the guided reading library. Also how a teacher chooses books for teacher read aloud was of interest.

Guided reading libraries. The survey teachers depended upon the school guided reading library as their primary means of learning about children's literature books for use in literature circle. Nearly one half of the books used for literature circles were chosen because they were in the guided reading library.

In comparison to the school library, the guided reading library had a more limited selection of books from which to choose. In some schools within this district, the guided reading library was quickly established to facilitate the implementation of the CELL/ExLL program. Books were often purchased because they came in leveled (according to readability) sets or were on sale in book club offers. The literacy specialist at the school was in charge of the guided reading library rather than the certificated librarian, which may have changed the use of the guided reading library books, from texts that provided interesting and engaging stories and information, to tools for reading instruction.

For teachers, preparation time is limited and sifting through library shelves or bookstores, studying reference materials, or reading a wide variety of children's books is usually not possible during school time. Additionally, purchasing sets of books to use for literacy groups is often cost prohibitive for classroom teachers. Therefore, teachers may tend to choose books for their literature circles from the school guided reading library where the books are arranged in grouped sets, have a reading level clearly marked on the set and are easy to access during teacher preparation time. While the establishment of the guided reading library as a resource to teachers may have facilitated the practice of literature circles, at the same time, it may have limited the types of children's literature books that teachers use.

Teacher read aloud. The sample teachers from the study depended upon their own likes and the recommendations of others for their selection of children's literature to use for read aloud. Twenty-three percent of the books chosen for read aloud were selected because they were a teacher's favorite as a child or as an adult reader. Thirty-three percent of the teacher read aloud books were on the recommendation of another teacher, the librarian or the literacy specialist at the school. When a teacher likes a book the students are more likely to like the book also. The teacher's example becomes very important in how students view a book.

Teachers generally share their ideas with other teachers. As evidenced by the teachers in this study, other teacher recommendation was one way of sharing the responsibility of choosing children's literature for use in the classroom.

Recommendations for Educational Practice

As this study looked at a sample from a single school district, the findings are most applicable to the teachers within that district. Therefore, the recommendations will primarily address the needs of Central School District.

While the development of the guided reading library in each of the sample schools has created a resource for teachers, the contents may limit the genres of children's literature that teachers use for literacy instruction. If, indeed, teachers depend upon the guided reading library for the majority of the books they use in literature circles, the quality and quantity of the books in the guided reading library may warrant further study.

Each person responsible for the maintaining the guided reading library should use the professional resources available for evaluating the suitability, quality and features of

children's books included in the guided reading library and use care in their selection of new books. Many resources are available for this task. Twice a year, the International Reading Association (IRA) provides a list of recently published professional books on a particular topic that may help with the selection of information, picture, and fiction books (Opitz & Zbaracki, 2003). Additionally, Sudol and King (1996) published a checklist for evaluating nonfiction children's literature that may be helpful in reviewing and evaluating the suitability of informational books for the guided reading library.

More genres should be included in the guided reading library. Adding sets of picture books to the guided reading library may provide teachers with another appropriate resource for their literature circles. Additionally, publishers are printing many sets of informational books on topics that children of all ages would enjoy and benefit from reading. As these books are included in the guided reading library, they will be more accessible to teachers for use in their classrooms.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

There are several limitations from this research. First, this study was conducted on a sample population in a single school district. While the survey data provided an interesting look into a group of classrooms, the use of the data should be restricted to the sample population. More research that includes data on a larger population, multiple settings and different types of classrooms would be valuable in determining if the data presented in this paper could be generalized to other teachers' classrooms in different districts.

Further examination into how changes in district literacy policy, such as the establishment of guided reading libraries, influence teacher choice and use of children's

literature in the classroom may shed more light on the choices teachers make when choosing children's literature. Information about how the teacher's choices have changed over time may reveal important information about the success of the guided reading libraries in encouraging the use of more children's literature for literacy instruction.

Research related to movies and children's literature might prove beneficial as teachers consider student motivation. With the growing market on family films, children's books are being used more frequently because a book's name recognition and proven appeal make it a likely candidate for adaptation into a movie. This media interest in children's literature may be worth exploring to illuminate any connections between the movie industry and the books children read. This type of information may support a teacher's selection of children's literature to increase student motivation.

Summary

This study suggested that teachers' use of children's literature in the classroom is variable but important. A teacher choice of children's literature has an impact on the quality of education each student receives. Meek (2001) addressed the consequence of children's literature:

> We can rarely tell in advance how the books young people read might influence them. Text details may linger in the reader's memory when the carefully inserted information has been assimilated or forgotten. Stories may come back to us as feelings related to the total reading experience even if the sequence of events is no longer clear. (p. 121)

Perhaps as the focus for teaching literacy shifts to more use of children's literature, teachers would benefit from considering the impact their choices have on the students they teach.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Teacher Survey

Teacher Number _____

Title of Book _____ Author

_____

Number of students who read/heard this book _____

Group make-up: # of boys _____ # of girls _____

1. For which instructional activity was this book used? (Please mark one.)
_____ Read aloud
_____ Book club/literature circle

2. Which type of book is it?
_____ Picture book
_____ Chapter book

3. Why did you choose this book? (Please mark all that apply.)
_____ It meets a need in my comprehension/skills instruction.
_____ It introduces a concept I need to teach.
_____ It integrates with other curriculum.
_____ The students like it.
_____ I consider it quality literature to which every student should be exposed.
_____ It teaches a moral or lesson I think is important for my students.
_____ It is one of my favorites.
_____ The topic is developmentally appropriate for this age group.
_____ It is on the students' instructional reading level.
_____ Other, please explain _____

4. How did you learn about this book? (Please choose the primary way.)
_____ Recommended by another teacher
_____ Found in the school guided reading library
_____ From an in-service training (e. g. conference, workshop)
_____ Recommended in a pre-service teacher training class (i.e. university professor, university text)
_____ Favorite from my own reading experience as a child
_____ Favorite of mine as an adult reader
_____ Found in a book club offer (i.e. Scholastic, Arrow)
_____ Part of a classroom set
_____ From a printed or on-line book review (i.e. Reading Teacher, New York Times)
_____ From a website (i.e. posted lesson plan)
_____ From a list of recommended or award winning books (i.e. Newbery, Horn Book)
_____ Recommended by the librarian
_____ Recommended by literacy specialist
_____ Other, please list _____

5. The copy/copies of this book belong to:
_____ the school guided reading (leveled) library
_____ the classroom library
_____ the public library
_____ the school library
_____ my personal collection
_____ another teacher
_____ Other, please list _____

Appendix B
Teacher Demographics

Teacher Name
_____

Sex: _____ M
_____ F

1. Ethnicity (mark all that apply):
_____ Afro American
_____ Native American
_____ Caucasian
_____ Hispanic
_____ Asian American
_____ Other (Please specify) _____

2. How many years of teaching experience do you have? _____

3. From which college/university did you receive your instruction in children's literature (mark any that apply)?

_____ Utah Valley State College

_____ Utah State University

_____ Brigham Young University

_____ University of Utah

_____ Southern Utah University

_____ Other _____

4. Mark all those that apply

_____ PhD/EdD degree in _____

_____ Masters degree in _____

_____ BS/BA degree

_____ Reading endorsement

_____ Currently working on reading endorsement

_____ Member of International Reading Association

5. How many children's literature books are in your classroom? _____

How many belong to the school? _____

How many belong to you personally? _____

Appendix C

Research Subject Consent Form
Data Collection on Children's Literature

Introduction: As part of the requirements for my master's thesis, I, Shauna Raby, am collecting information on the children's literature that is being used in grade 4-6 classrooms in Central District. You were selected because you are a classroom teacher in one of those grades.

Procedures: If you choose to participate, you will complete a survey for each of the children's literature books that you read in school for teacher read aloud, or that the students read in preparation for literature circles or discussion groups. In field-testing, I found that each survey takes between 2 – 3 minutes to complete. You will be asked to complete a survey for each book used during the 2005-2006 school year. The surveys will be turned in to the literacy coordinator at the school where I will collect them. For the October collection, I ask that you reflect back on the August and September reading and in April, I ask that you anticipate which books you will read.

Risks: This study presents minimal risks to the participants. The demographic information sheet asks for your ethnic and educational background. **You may choose not to complete the demographic information sheet and still participate in the study by completing the survey.** The information obtained will be reported anonymously to district personnel. I, as the primary researcher, will be the only person with access to the demographic information sheet.

Benefits: When this research is complete, each literacy coordinator in the district will receive a complete listing of the children's literature that is being used throughout the district in the 4^{th}-6^{th} grade classrooms. Teachers can access this information to assist them in choosing children's literature. The district literacy coordinator will have access to the complete study to assist in curriculum decisions for the district. For ease of access, the thesis will be posted on the Internet. The results of this study may be submitted to professional publications to add to the field of knowledge about children's literature.

Confidentiality: You will have a tracking number to put on your surveys. This will assure anonymity to the participants. I will be the only person with the key to match the surveys to the respondent and corresponding demographic information. Individual information will not be reported.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Participation: Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your position in the district, and will have the same access to the collected information as those who participated.

Questions about the Research: If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:

Shauna Raby
Phone: (801) 422-8318
Address: Brigham Young University
215 McKay Building
Provo, Utah 84602
e-mail: shaunar@provo.edu

Questions about your Rights as Research Participants: If you would like to discuss your rights as a research subject, please contact:

Dr. Jim Jacobs
Phone: (801) 422-4889
Address: Brigham Young University
201-L McKay Building
Provo, Utah 84602
e-mail: Jim_Jacobs@byu.edu

I understand and have receive a copy of the consent form and agree to participate in this research project.

_____ _____
(Participant Signature) (Date)

_____
(Witness Signature)