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Teenage Reading
Personal reading beyond school; habits, attitudes and beliefs.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

June 2010
Acknowledgments

After all, reading is what matters, and has always mattered to me ... I can't stop reading without feeling anxious and extinguished: I read, therefore I am (Gekoski, 2009).

I am very aware of the considerable support I have had to complete this thesis. A number of very accomplished fellow – readers, including my partner Lindy Graham, have been constant motivators, critics, colleagues and friends as I have stumbled through the research and writing processes. I will thank them individually and probably with books.

It is important to specifically thank my supervisor, Mrs Sharon Young. Mrs Young was at all times a highly professional yet empathetic supervisor who provided support and critical analysis, of both a theoretical and practical nature, from the conception of the project through the data gathering phase and during the final ‘write-up’. I am grateful to her.

I want to also mention, my daughter, Jessica Lee Taylor, who is, I believe, truly a member of the ‘cuspal generation’. Her presence loomed large in my mind as I worked on this thesis. Perhaps one day she will read this; either on screen or on the page.

Of course, without the participants there would have been no project. I have attempted to honour their intentions and input and to place their ‘voices’ at the centre of my work. I thank them for the privilege they accorded me during our time together.

Any frailties in this report are, obviously, completely my own responsibility.

John Taylor
June 2010

There is something about reading which takes you beyond the constrictions of space and time, frees you from the limits of social interaction and allows you to escape. Whoever you encounter in the pages of a book, whatever lives you vicariously live with them can affect you deeply – entertain you briefly, change your view of the world, open your eyes to a wholly different concept of living and the value of life (Simpson, 2003).
Abstract

This report presents the findings of research, undertaken in 2008/2009, that sought to explore the habits, attitudes and beliefs of a group of teenagers with particular reference to the personal reading they did outside of school hours.

Specifically the research project investigated both the traditional and digital reading the teenagers did and sought to place this reading in the context of other activities they took part in and commitments they had. In addition the research interrogated their attitudes and beliefs around reading and explored their views of the changing nature of reading.

The six participants were older (17 and 18 year old) ‘teenagers’, senior students at a large urban secondary school in the southern part of Aotearoa/New Zealand. All identified themselves as keen, successful readers and were, relatively, academically able.

Located predominantly within a qualitative research paradigm, the project was grounded in a socio-cultural-historical context (Mutch, 2005) and employed a largely social constructionist approach (Crotty, 1998). The researcher’s intention was to co-construct the project with the participants and thus to employ an emergent design where participant voices would be the key factor in both the process and outcome of the project. The methodology used can, however, most accurately be defined as ‘mixed method’ (R. Burke-Johnson, A. J. Onwuegbuzie, 2004) since the data was ultimately collected using both qualitative and quantitative strategies and tools, some suggested by the researcher and some driven by the participants.

The research highlighted the evolutionary nature of reading. In particular the project underlined the fact that these teenagers living in the early twenty first century are exposed to, and engage freely in, both traditional and digital reading, that reading is important to them despite the fact that other activities in their busy lives constrain the amount of reading they can do and that they cannot easily conceive of a world where books are superseded by technological mechanisms as the primary source of reading material.
The research findings concluded therefore, that the teenagers who participated in this project are members of a *cuspal generation*. As such their habits, attitudes and beliefs reflect the tensions between traditional notions of reading for pleasure and emerging ones, and can provide us with indicative information and insights as to how reading might continue to evolve.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Purpose

Why do some kids love reading? What is rewarding and engaging about reading for these students? What do these engaged readers 'do' as they read that makes the experience fun, satisfying and engaging for them? (Wilhelm, 1997, p.7).

The purpose of this research was to enhance understanding of the habits, attitudes and beliefs pertaining to the personal reading of teenagers. The research project looked at the reading done outside of school hours by teenagers who could be considered to be motivated, capable readers and, broadly, asked why they believe reading to be important, how much they read and what other digital literacies they engaged with. Further, like the extensive research done by the National Literacy Trust (NLT) and published in 2008 under the title Young people's self-perceptions as reader investigation including family peer and school influences, this study explored young people's perceptions of themselves as readers and examined such factors as; the extent to which young people saw themselves as readers, what it means to them to be a reader, what characteristics they typically assigned to readers, what texts the readers enjoyed, and the extent to which these perceptions were shaped by their family, friends and school.

In embarking on this research I was cognisant of several inter-related facts. Much is already known of the link between strong literacy skills (particularly vocabulary development and strong reading skills) and reading mileage (Dymock, 2005). Further, reading mileage impacts on academic achievement in general and there is now a proven link between strong reading skills and personal and social success (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). There is also a growing body of evidence that voluntary reading for pleasure is, in itself, likely to contribute to the success of individuals academically, emotionally and socially (NEA, 2007) So, as an educator, I along with the authors of the National Literacy Trust report (2008) could see the benefit of understanding what constituted a ‘good reader’. As Clark, Osbourne and Akerman reasoned in that report:
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By exploring possible differences between readers and non-readers, as well as their peer and family support for reading, it is hoped that any differences between the two groups might highlight the steps that could be taken to engage pupils in reading who perceive reading to be a chore (p.25).

However, while I do have a considerable interest in literacy and reading as a facet of the secondary and tertiary education sectors, my interest in teenage reading was not merely functional or utilitarian. I wanted to know more about the dynamic, evolutionary and complex nature of teenage reading and the varying contexts in which it takes place.

The reason for embarking upon this research was thus specifically to expand my understanding of teenage reading for pleasure, outside of school. For the purposes of this project I adopted the NLT's definition:

*Reading for pleasure refers to reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that having begun at someone else's request we continue because we are interested in it* (Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p.6).

I wanted to gain a more holistic understanding of this facet of teenage reading at this point in time, to take a ‘snapshot’, to see how reading at home and school interfaced and where reading for pleasure sits in the overall lives of 21st century teenagers.

While there is a considerable international body of research dealing with policies, programmes and practices relating to reading that takes place in secondary schools (Dymock, 1995, Parr and Maguiness, 2005) there is, however, less research material that illuminates the reading for pleasure teenagers do outside of school and how that impacts on reading and academic success in secondary school and beyond. This is particularly true of the New Zealand context. Though the interface between reading at home and reading at school was not, by design, a major focus of this research, that link became, inevitably, obvious during the project and, for me as a literacy advisor, an interesting by-product of the research. It became clear to me during the course of the research that in order to know what in-school programmes and approaches might enhance students’ attitudes toward, and participation in, reading in the future, we need to understand more about the attitudes, beliefs and habits teenagers have with regard to reading outside of school, or indeed, reading per se. In this regard I agree with Lenters (2006) that secondary education systems need to recognise and value the literacies valued by their students. We need to better understand the range and nature of other literacy encounters that teenagers have which impact upon the more traditional
notion of wide-reading for pleasure. In this respect I agree with the view that; "... we must now take into account patterns of computer use and also magazine, newspaper and comic reading habits, 'vernacular literacies' as they term them" (Halls & Coles, 1999, cited in Hopper, 2005). Indeed it might be argued that researchers and educators need to interrogate afresh what 'reading', in these times of obvious transitions in and diversity of literacy, actually is, how it should be defined, viewed and even taught. Wolf states in her 2008 book, *Proust And The Squid*: "Like the ancient Greeks we are embarked on a powerfully important transition- in our case from a written culture to one that is more digital and visual" (p.72) and, she may have added, the research accompanying such change needs to trace the nature and implications of this transition.

Therefore this research seeks to deepen understanding of what maturing teenagers read, how they read and, in the broadest sense, why they read. And, since the teenagers I worked with on this research are what I have called a 'cuspal generation', this research by implication seeks to understand how the place of reading in society is changing and might continue to change in the future.

**Context**

*For them reading was an adventure that was unique each time. The books were suggestions, maps to be consulted, edited, deviated from. For these children a book was a promise and reading was an experiential fulfilment of that promise (Wilhelm, 1997, p.6).*

It is widely accepted that reading is inherently a good thing to do. A review of the literature reveals that numerous researchers and writers have asserted the literacy, and consequent academic, benefits of reading. Further, numerous studies have linked personal growth and social success to wide personal reading. In short "Reading is an important gateway to personal development and to social, economic and civic life" (Holden, 2004, cited in Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p.5) and, as the United Kingdom Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003) observed; "... people cannot be active or informed citizens unless they can read. Reading is a prerequisite for almost all cultural and social activities" (cited in Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p.5).
As a convinced reader, a teacher of subject English in both secondary and tertiary settings, a literacy consultant in New Zealand secondary schools and in the Pacific nation state of Niue during the period 2000 to 2008, I have an obvious interest in reading and hold convictions about its importance and worthiness.

In my professional life I have observed, and indeed been an advocate for, a range of in-school programmes designed to increase reading efficacy, to raise academic literacy and to encourage reading for pleasure. In one of the few New Zealand studies on teenage reading in schools, since Bardsley’s in 1991, I surveyed 38 teachers of junior English in a total of eight secondary schools in the lower half of the South Island, in order to see if the Personal Reading function of the New Zealand curriculum in English (2003) was being accorded value through structured personal reading programmes in school time (Taylor, 2002). I will refer briefly to this study later.

I have become increasingly aware that such programmes as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Peer Tutoring and Community-assisted Tutoring may not be effective in developing enthusiastic life-long readers. I have also, latterly, empathised with the legitimate questions asked by secondary school teachers (across the curriculum) as to whether the time dedicated to reading programmes (other than remedial ones) is, proportionally, worthwhile or effective. Referring to the reading mileage hypothesis as it applies in primary and intermediate schools, Dymock (1995) mirrors some of my concerns when she questions the assumption that any type of reading whether easy or hard, benefits the reader, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition. My recent observations of SSR, for instance, in a variety of secondary schools, suggest to me that many older students cannot see the benefits of reading and are disengaging from the practice of reading within the school milieu. It seems, in short, that reading in school is not ‘cool’.

In addition to this professional interest in reading and to my own engagement with it, I have a further personal reason for being curious about reading. My fourteen year old (at the time of writing) daughter is an avid and accomplished reader. As measured against New Zealand curriculum levels, and assessed according to the Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) mechanism she is reading at a level considerably above her chronological age and above the level of most of her peers. While this is beneficial to her academic progress, it is her deep immersion in and enjoyment of books that is noteworthy. Interesting too, is the fact that
she moves effortlessly between traditional text and digital literacies, enjoying and engaging skilfully with both.

While there are certainly many enthusiastic and successful teenage readers like my daughter, it is a moot point as to whether such adolescents read despite school, rather than because of school. It might be argued that 'enforced' reading at school alienates potential readers and disillusions those already committed to reading. Further, a consequence of this hypothesis is that, in general and over time, the amount of voluntary reading for pleasure taking place may decline. If this perceived trend in New Zealand is an alarming one for educators and social-scientists in general, (and given the proven links between reading, in all of its forms, and academic and civic success and fulfilment, one would guess that it is alarming), this decline is certainly not only occurring in Aotearoa.

In America in 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) published a detailed study showing that Americans in almost every demographic group were reading at significantly lower rates than 10 or 20 years earlier. The declines were steepest among young adults. More recently these statistics were updated by the NEA in their major report To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence (2007). Specifically and by way of selective example; in the age group 18 – 24, the percentage of young Americans who read a book not required for work or school in 2002 was 52%, a decline of 12% over the previous decade. The percentage of 17 year olds who read nothing at all for pleasure had doubled over a 20 year period and in 2004 only 22% of 17 year olds read for pleasure almost every day.

In the United Kingdom the data available seems less pessimistic overall while still illustrating problematic trends. The National Literacy Trust (NLT) state in their 2006 report, Reading for pleasure: A research overview, that:

* A survey of school children for World Book Day in 2002 found that 15 to 16 year old boys spent 2.3 hours a week reading for pleasure, compared to 9 hours a week playing computer games or 11 hours watching television. Girls spent considerably more time reading namely 4.5 hours a week. ..... Specifically, 81% of 11 to 12 year olds and 76% of 14 to 16 year olds reported reading for pleasure (p.10).

What the situation is in New Zealand is not easily discernible from the literature available. I suspect that many teenagers do, in fact, read extensively outside of school, albeit sometimes covertly. Indeed the New Zealand researcher, Barwood (2001) has gathered information that
home was the place where they (teenagers) read most. However, these results varied according to gender, with males being over seven times more likely to do their reading at school. This data accords with that generated by Hopper (2005) whose study of English adolescents aged from 11 to 15 years showed that 61% of the sample claimed to be reading a book at home, 67% of girls and 54% of boys.

Wherever teenagers read, exactly how much they read, what they read and what their beliefs about reading are does not seem clearly evident from recent research, particularly in the New Zealand context.

Further, there is little information about how the increasing use of digital literacies is affecting traditional reading amongst mature New Zealand teenagers nor about what other factors may be affecting reading patterns generally in this country. This seems to me to be a crucial area for consideration as we consider the evolving nature of literacy and, within that, the place of reading. As Ohler, (2009) avers in his article *Orchestrating the Media Collage*; “Much of the emerging nature of literacy is a result of inexpensive, widely available, flexible Web 2.0 tools that enable anyone, regardless of technical skill to play some part in re-inventing literacy” (p.12).

A further and encompassing, (in terms of what is to follow), comment needs to be made here. The rate of change in terms of technology and its impact on traditional reading habits and attitudes, is rapid. The process of researching, analysing and documenting these changes is more laborious. Thus, even this recent project is likely to become dated quickly and require a sequel.

**Scope**

The size of my study was both deliberately limited and limited by circumstance. Since the purpose of the study was to gain a rich and deep understanding of teenage reading and the socio-cultural context that it takes place in, a large sample was neither necessary nor manageable. Further, as described below, both the recruitment of the sample and the participants eventually involved were necessarily predicated on pragmatism.
The recruitment of the sample deliberately targeted older teenagers and, though their reading capability was not measured, the fact that they volunteered to participate indicated that they were likely to be interested in reading and, in fact, data gathered in the project indicated that they were, anecdotally at least, keen and competent readers. It should be noted here that while I have referred to the participants as ‘teenagers’, I could equally have referred to them as ‘young people’. I chose to predominantly use the terms ‘teenagers’ and ‘adolescents’ throughout the report since these terms are used most often in the wider literature.

The reasons for selecting older and relatively successful readers were threefold. First; there has been much work done with (and on) younger remedial, resistant, struggling readers as part of literacy programmes in New Zealand and internationally. Indeed, it is interesting to note that; “The strong connection between reading for pleasure and literacy achievement has been established largely by research into children’s reading. Direct research into the effect of reading for pleasure on adult literacy is scarce” (Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p.9). One might add that research into the ongoing effect of reading for pleasure on evolving teenage literacy is also limited. The emerging neuroscience around the development of reading is leading us to believe that adolescence (and how one characterises the length of that period is under question) is an important phase in reading growth. For instance, Stock, in his 2008 overview of literary history and the history of reading, argues that:

In sum, adolescence is the time of a person’s life when the brain and the literary environment in which the brain is working seem most capable of influencing each other. The precortical regions of the brain are expanding, as new experiences occur ... (p.399).

And, presumably, such correlations influence the manner in which teenagers read and what they take from that reading.

Secondly, evidence such as that provided by Hopper (2005), suggests that there is a decline in reading as children become adolescents and then maturing teenagers. I wanted to touch on this issue and find out why. Lastly; these young people, it can be argued, are potential leaders (in an academic, intellectual and social sense) of a generation that effectively engages and utilises both traditional text and digital literacies. Therefore in this regard they can be considered a ‘cuspal’ demographic, the study of which might be indicative of future trends in reading.
The scope of the project was, at least in theory, broad, since the design of it allowed for considerable freedom of discussion within the parameters of the research questions. However it is acknowledged here that issues of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status were not specifically canvassed in the project and are only fleetingly evident in this report apart from in the literature review.

**Key concepts and terms**

This section provides initial definitions of several ideas and terms important in the research report. I have not attempted to provide an exhaustive glossary but merely to introduce my conception of these key concepts and terms, the understanding of which might better facilitate the reading of the report. I have expanded upon, and provided further justification for, these definitions and others, in the body of the report.

- **Reading**: for the purpose of this report, and in the interests of simplicity and clarity, I have adopted Stock's 2008 definition. “Reading is, on one hand, an individual process, by which individuals turn graphic symbols into personal meaning, and, on the other, a collective process, by which groups understand the same symbols within an agreed range of linguistic conventions” (p.399). In this report an underlying assumption is that reading is a seminal human activity. If, as Donald (2001, cited in Stock, 2008) states; “... the human mind is .... an hybrid product of biology and culture.” then I agree with Stock when he argues that “Literacy and reading are the major institutions evolved by the human species to mediate between these two constituencies” (p.399).

- **Reading for pleasure**: I have used Clark and Rumbold's 2006 definition which appears in the text of page 2 of this report but is repeated here for ease of access:

  *Reading for pleasure refers to reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that having begun at someone else's request we continue because we are interested in it (p.6).*

  Other terms such as 'voluntary reading' and 'personal reading' have been used interchangeably throughout the report; a liberal interpretation of terms reflected in the wider literature on the subject.

- **Traditional text**: this term refers to printed words on a paper page. It assumes that such words are organised in accordance with accepted syntactical conventions.
Introduction

- Digital literacies: Ohler, (2009) begins to define digital literacy and its all pervading influence when he writes: "At the epicentre of the evolving nature of literacy is digital literacy, the term du jour used to describe the skills, expectations and perspectives involved in living in a technological society" (p.9). Gasser and Palfrey (2009) refer to "digital natives" who they define as "... young people born after 1980 who have access to digital technology and the skills to use it" (p.15). Medina (2008) defines a similar cohort more narrowly as the "net generation". Digital literacies therefore refer to such activities as texting using mobile telephones, playing interactive games using computers or play-station devices, surfing the internet for information and pleasure and social networking using computers.

- Cuspal generation: For the purposes of this research report I have coined this term and take it to mean members of those generations who not only have access to both traditional text and digital technology but use both discriminately. Potentially, and with reference to Gasser and Palfrey’s definition above, this would include all people born after 1980 and those who will be born for an unknown (and unpredictable?) number of generations to come. However my more particular, subjective and optimistic conception of these cuspal generations is that they will be characterised by ‘readers’ who utilise both forms of literacy with pleasure, skilfully and appropriately.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Reading for pleasure is an extraordinary activity. The black squiggles on the white page are still as the grave, colourless as the moonlit desert; but they give the skilled reader a pleasure as acute as the touch of a loved body, as rousing, colourful and transfiguring as anything out there in the real world (Nell, 1998, p5).

Teenagers read at home and at school, and to vastly varying degrees. It is generally accepted that such reading, both for information and pleasure, is beneficial to those teenagers in terms of their personal development and their academic success. Teachers, in particular, give credence to the notion that reading is an essential ingredient to the creation of what is popularly referred to as ‘life-long learners’ and agree that any decline in reading will produce dire consequences (Birkerts, 1994). Less certain, it seems, is an acceptance that ‘digital reading’ is a legitimate form of reading and a form whose time has come.

There is an extensive body of research around these universally held views about the relationship between reading and literacy, academic growth and personal development and fulfilment. Gallik (1999), for instance, chronicles some of this literature. Quoting the Report of the Commission on Reading in the United States (1985) Gallik notes; “Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success will inevitably be lost” (p.480).

There is also a burgeoning body of research around the emergent issues inherent in digital literacy and its impact on, and interface with, traditional reading. As Snyder (2008) observes: “Large scale surveys have examined the relationships between the media, childhood, the family and the home. The surveys have found that young people live media –filled lives with access to an unprecedented amount of media in their lives” (p.18).

Similar research situated in Aotearoa/New Zealand, however, is less plentiful, particularly with regard to the latter field.
Specifically and crucially, the issue of voluntary reading for leisure and as a cultural activity amongst teenagers is worthy of further investigation. I believe that, in the quest to raise the literacy levels of students, both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally, the teaching of reading has been approached in a manner that is not necessarily engaging or efficacious. Similarly until recently (and particularly in New Zealand) the research into that reading has often been focussed on the mechanics of reading, and on data that might suggest how reading could be improved. Griswold, McDonnell, and Wright (2005) acknowledge the value of interrogating literacy processes but observe that; “Although literacy raises valid questions, in the 1990s the research focus shifted to reading as a social practice, now asking who reads what, how people read, and how their reading relates to their other activities” (p.127.). Love and Hamston, (2004) note that three research perspectives have underpinned the investigation of the reading habits and attitudes of teenagers, namely; the psycholinguistic, sociologically oriented and socio-cultural paradigms. Of these; “Research within a psycholinguistic tradition offers relatively few insights to date into changing patterns of reading, the experiences and attitudes of teenagers, particularly teenagers who are capable readers” (Love & Hamston, 2004, p.339). Sociologically-oriented research provides a useful broad context within which to study readers but, inevitably the most useful and “... fine-grained research ...” will be of a socio-cultural nature (Love & Hamston, 2004, p.339). This is the research framework that I am drawn to as I embark on my own study.

Since it is my belief that, broadly speaking, the state of reading is in a historically significant transition and that capable teenage readers are likely to be the (albeit unwitting) embodiment of this transition I am interested in better understanding teenage reading specifically in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context.

Overview

The central purpose of this literature review is, therefore, to canvas literature relevant to the reading habits of teenagers, to their attitudes toward reading and their beliefs about reading.

The review first, however, seeks to discuss the status and state of reading in general and therefore to place teenage reading in a wider social and historical context. Parallel to this, the review will trace the development of research into reading since this is, in itself, an illuminating and comprehensively documented area of study. Further discussion will include
notions of the importance of reading and the relationship between traditional reading and other literacy encounters that readers have. Such literacy encounters are predominantly digital, such as texting, on-line communication and computer games. Built into this discussion is an acceptance that "Literacy practices include two kinds of reading, one in which reading is the main goal of the activity and the other in which reading is the means to another end..." (Griswold et al. 2005, p.134).

The review then moves to consider the research literature pertinent to teenage reading. Much of this research is grounded in the wider socio-cultural context of what teenagers do (other than read), what other activities and pre-occupations govern their discretionary time. There is also a brief section dealing with the vexed question of whether teenagers are reading less now than they did previously. Such issues as the influence of early life experiences of reading and family will also emerge, as will factors such as motivation to read and resistance to reading. Inevitably literature on gender differences in reading will be touched upon. While this issue is not investigated further in the wider report, I have chosen to allude to it here in the literature review simply because the reading achievements (or lack of them) and consequent impact of this on boys, in particular, is so prevalent in many major studies and remains a contentious and intriguing issue for some academics. The place of school in the lives of teenage reading will then be covered in some depth. Particularly pertinent, in terms of my research project, are the latter sections on what and how much teenagers read, their attitudes to reading and the manner in which teenagers engage in both traditional and digital reading.

The review concludes with a synthesis of the main ideas evoked by a study of the literature and focusses on a discussion of two linked, contemporary themes that have emerged from my reading. I conclude by describing how these ideas might inform my quest for a deeper, richer understanding of the reading done by New Zealand teenagers and the factors that impact upon that reading.

**Scope**

*Reading: the term is as generous and imprecise as "love". So often it means more than just the word-by-word deciphering of the printed page. Although that definition is primary, the words etymology (from the Anglo-Saxon raedan, "to make out, to interpret") points us*
toward open sea. We use the term freely to denote diverse and non-specific involvements with texts (Birkets, 1994, p.95).

This literature review will concentrate mainly on books and journal articles from 1990 onwards. While this date is arbitrary it does appear that the amount of research focusing on reading has increased exponentially during the past two decades. In 1988 for instance Anderson, Wilson and Fielding wrote that: “Few studies have provided precise data on how much reading school children do” (p.285). But now such studies are numerous and extensive. Most of the literature surveyed is international but I have attempted to locate and discuss literature pertaining to the Aotearoa/New Zealand context as well. While some of these studies are small they do, for the most part, iterate and illuminate themes and trends from overseas whilst foreshadowing the possibility of further studies needed in New Zealand. I have not hesitated to include reference to recently published ‘popular’ material on the nature of reading and ‘book culture’ where I believe it to be of sufficient substance and to have academic credibility.

As noted above, the review will touch upon issues of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and education as factors pertinent to exposure to, motivation for and success in reading. Similarly, while this review seeks to focus on teenage reading outside of school, reference to reading at school and for school is included because of the impact that school has on students’ attitudes to reading.

It is important to note that throughout the literature review, and indeed throughout the wider research report, I have deliberately separated reference to traditional and digital reading, providing discrete sections on various aspects of both forms of reading, rather than attempting to synthesise this material into one, integrated view of reading. This decision, ironic perhaps in view of the conclusions I have ultimately drawn, has been made for reasons of structural clarity; so that the reader may gain a sense of parallel types of reading that are, gradually and inevitably merging.

In this review, as in the wider research report, ‘reading’ will be defined as: the process of voluntary reading of written text for pleasure or information. (See pages two and eight of this report). “Unlike assigned reading in schools, voluntary reading involves the reader’s choice of what will be read, where and when it is read and invites no check on comprehension or
measurement of success, other than determined by the reader him/herself” (Richardson & Eccles, 2007, p.343). As noted above terms such as ‘recreational reading’, ‘reading for pleasure’ and ‘voluntary reading’ will be used interchangeably.

Where used, the phrase other ‘literacy encounters’ will be defined as engagement with digital literacy which will be taken to mean such encounters as texting, emailing, social networking, surfing the internet and computer games. It should be noted here that while, in the interests of brevity and simplicity, this review generally uses the term ‘digital literacy’ to cover reading of all non-traditional texts, there is in reality a delineation to be made between what is known as Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. The former may be seen as more a passive medium where information is delivered to the user where as the latter (Wikipedia and social networking sites being but two examples) are more interactive.

Literature

To read is to fly: it is to soar to a point of vantage which gives a view over wide terrains of history, human variety, ideas, shared experience and the fruits of many inquiries (A.C. Grayling, cited in Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p.16).

The status and state of reading: social and historical context.

That reading for pleasure is important, in many ways, is not in dispute among recent researchers. Clark and Rumbold, whose 2006 report was written on behalf of the National Literacy Trust (NLT) in the United Kingdom, list the following literacy-related benefits (referring to ten other research sources as they do so) of reading; reading attainment, writing ability, text comprehension, grammar, breadth of vocabulary, positive reading attitudes, greater self-confidence and pleasure reading in later life. Literature around the benefits of reading in increasing vocabulary, in particular, is voluminous. Stanovich and Cunningham (1998) are amongst numerous researchers probing the positive relationship between print exposure and word knowledge.

Summarising past research in 1999, Worthy, Moorman and Turner (cited in Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005, p.95) reported that: “... when children and adolescents engage in voluntary reading about topics that truly interest them, their effort, motivation and attitudes about reading improve.” In 2007 a major study, The Progress in International Reading Literacy
Study (PIRLS), emphasised this link between reading for pleasure and educational attainment (Twist, Schagen & Hodgson, 2007).

The NLT researchers (2006) chronicle other benefits of reading such as; general knowledge, a better understanding of other cultures, community participation and a greater insight into human nature and decision-making (p.10). A National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) report published in 2006 contains exhaustive detail showing correlations between reading and participating in society, reading and voting patterns, reading and prison populations and so on.

The NEA Chairman, Dana Gioia, sums up this mass of data:

*All of the data suggest how powerfully reading transforms the lives of individuals – whatever their social circumstances. Regular reading not only boosts the likelihood of an individual’s academic and economic success – facts not particularly surprising – but it also seems to awaken a person’s social and civic sense. Reading correlates with almost every measurement of positive personal and social behaviour surveyed. It is reassuring, though hardly amazing, that readers attend more concerts and theatre than non-readers, but it is surprising that they exercise more and play more sports – no matter what their educational level. The cold statistics confirm something that most readers know but have mostly been reluctant to declare as fact – that books change lives for the better (p.6).*

A point to note here is that Gioia attributes all of these benefits to “books”, specifically. Since much research (NLT, 2008) notes that book reading is, in fact declining, particularly amongst teenagers, in favour of other reading such as newspapers and magazines, one wonders if his optimism is sustainable. Do magazines and newspapers also “change lives for the better”?

**Research into reading.**

Of course, reading has been integral to the development of civilisations and to the evolution of religious thought and philosophical debate within those civilisations for centuries. The study of reading is, as Stock (2008) puts it:

*... considerably older than the writing of literary history and is not grounded in any single period, doctrine or ideological position. The chronology of the subject can be divided conveniently into five phases, dealing respectively with oral traditions, alphabetic literacy, rolls and manuscripts, printing and computers (including advanced telephones). Its history can be written from a variety of perspectives, for example, those that deal with reading materials, reading practices and theories of interpretation (p.389).*
As writers like Stock and Wolf (2008) remind us, a crucial and early instance in this ongoing study of, and debate around, reading was the thinking and writing of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who first conceived of reading as a complex interface between oral and written communication. Seeking to impose some sense of objectivity upon the relationship between experience, spoken language and the written word, Aristotle noted that:

... spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experience, which these directly symbolise, is the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are images (De Interpretatione, n.d., cited in Stock, 2008).

Here we have, in part, a foreshadowing of Rosenblatt’s work in that she too wrestled with the tension between the commonality of experience readers have and (yet) the different perspectives they bring to texts.

Stock traces the history of reading from antiquity where reading was largely oral/aural through the development of meditative, silent reading in the monastic communities, past debate around ‘textual authority’ which lasted through the Renaissance and Reformation and on to such key influences on reading as the delineation between fact and fiction and the invention of the printing press. Stock concludes his overview:

The present phase of academic thinking about reading, which includes the transition from mechanical to computerised presentation of texts can be divided broadly into two segments. There is the non-scientific period, stretching roughly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries ... and there is the scientific period, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, when aspects of reading are examined in experimental psychology, neuroscience and medicine. ... A crossroads has evidently been reached, in which it is possible to envisage a literary discipline that makes use of knowledge arising from the history of literature as well as from the broader history of reading, including its psychological and neuroscientific dimensions (2008, p.390).

Thus we have reached a point in history where the way we view and research reading is broader, more inclusive, than previously.

An important figure contributing to the development of this broader range of theoretical frameworks within which to place the study of reading is Louise Rosenblatt. As Connell (2008) notes, “In fact, Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of the literary work is one of the more successful responses to Dewey’s call for an educational theory to be built on a permanent frame of reference to the organic nature of experience” (p.104). Rosenblatt:
... positions meaning in a generative or ‘transactional’ relation between reader and text, where the reader and meaning of a text are both constituted during a reading process that is dynamic rather than a process that takes place between separate, stable, entities. Readers make sense of texts by applying, reorganising, or extending both private and public elements selected from their personal linguistic-experiential reservoirs (2005, cited in Connell, 2008, p.103).

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading challenged earlier notions of what reading is and is seminal to much current thinking about the subject. She

... recognised that a radical change in the reading paradigm requires a new set of constructs for what it means to read and make meaning. In this new paradigm the idea of a generic reader is replaced by a recognition of millions of potential individual readers of individual literary works ... Crucial to the transactional perspective is that engagement with and personal response to a text are the starting point of a literary experience and the construction of meaning (Connell, 2008, p.109).

Rosenblatt’s stance, in essence, challenges Aristotle’s theory of ‘objectivity’. In addition to the development of this modern paradigm, Rosenblatt’s stance, as represented in Making Meaning with Texts: Selected Essays (2005), was consistently critical of the preponderance of “efferent” reading in schools as opposed to the “aesthetic” stance she considered to be so important for reading development and personal growth. Efferent reading is reading that which is “... focussed on facts, structural analysis, and a predetermined meaning” (Connell, 2008, p.116). Rosenblatt argued that while both efferent and aesthetic stances contained educational value an aesthetic stance permits the reader to “... live through some moment of feeling, to enter some human personality, or to participate imaginatively in some situation or event” (2005, p.62/63, cited in Connell, 2008). This is a significant point in that Rosenblatt’s insistence on the legitimacy of individual interpretation of texts values the reader’s responses and promotes individual engagement with, and enjoyment of, texts. Further her argument was that promoting a more aesthetic stance was likely to produce readers who read deeply and think critically about what they read. Willinsky (1991) credits Rosenblatt with being one of the most influential theorists in shaping how literature is taught in schools and maintains that she has contributed to challenging traditional views of knowledge.

A tangential but nevertheless pertinent point, in terms of this project, is that until relatively recently it seems that, as Atkinson, (2006) records, much literacy teaching and research has targeted primary students rather than secondary students and has focussed on the technical aspects of reading rather than the affective ones.
Increasingly, however, researchers are recognising the importance of such issues as motivation, attitudes and particularly the reader self-concept. This focus is at the forefront of the NLT’s 2008 report entitled; *Young people’s self-perceptions as readers: An investigation including family, peer and school influences.* In this study Clark et al., referring to self-defined readers, found that:

... self-concept seems to be linked to all facets of reading behaviour and attitudes. For example, readers not only read significantly more often and widely than non-readers but they also associated reading with more positive feelings and viewed readers more favourably" (p.56).

Griswold et al (2005) state that recent research has challenged the idea that reading is merely the act of an individual sitting down and reading a book. They argue that two dominant ideas in that research are present. The first of these is that reading is a social practice that pervades almost all aspects of life, sometimes going almost unnoticed. The second idea is that reading is also “collective” (p.132) in that people do read in groups and share ideas about reading.

The idea of ‘communities’ of readers is seen also in the writing of Dolatkhah (2008) but here such ‘communities’ are viewed more broadly and in terms of the constraints they impose on the individual reader. Referring to the work of the historian Robert Chartier (1995), Dolatkhah agrees that:

... the concept of communities of readers or of interpretation, seems to imply another kind of limitation on the individual reader’s liberty. This is because different communities have different norms and conventions of reading, defining for each community the legitimate uses of the book, the forms of reading, and the instruments and procedures of interpretation. As part of a social community, the reader is guided and restricted by social norms and routines (p.221).

This is an important idea and one which is reflected in the methodology adopted in this project; that is, the use of group interviews, and in the findings which verify the idea of communities of readers who value reading as inherently good.

In general the manner in which reading has been researched has, unsurprisingly, evolved parallel to the nature of reading itself. The trend has been from empirical research within a quantitative framework to a focus on more qualitative or mixed method approaches. As Long (1992, cited in Allington & Swann, 2009, p.220) writes: “Studying literary reading as social practice means investigating ways in which it is subject to social or institutional determinants of what’s available to read, what is ‘worth reading’ and how to read it.” Hall (2008) argues
more specifically for an ethnographic approach to reader research, an approach that has "ecological validity". Allington and Swann (2009) themselves are suspicious of more empirical approaches to reading:

*Psychological experiments on literary reading, with their 'think aloud' protocols, their rating tasks, their tests of recall etc.- not to mention the exam-like environments in which they often take place ... might be thought signally unsuited to the task of building up a model of 'ordinary reading' (p.224).*

Similarly, there have been noticeable schools of thought in the research done into digital literacies and the impact of technology. Snyder, (2008), observing that paradigms shape the questions asked by researchers, identifies two main research paradigms in this regard as technological and social determinism, and defines them:

The main idea behind technological determinism is that qualities in the technology are responsible for changes that invariably affect social relationships... Social determinism is the inverse... It argues that those who use the technology have agency and control over how it is used (p.17).

Snyder goes on to argue, in relation to the application of research paradigms to digital literacies, that:

*As the research into the impacts of technology on society, and education in particular, has developed, 'domestication theory' has offered a more generative way to think about digital literacy. Domestication theory is essentially a pragmatic approach. It accepts the idea that technologies have effects on people and that people shape their uses. Domestication theory looks at both the interactions between individuals and technologies and the contexts within which the technologies are being used" (Snyder, 2008, p.17).*

(Domestication theory as it pertains to recent digital literacies mirrors, to some degree, the idea of how social context has, throughout history, affected the way we view traditional texts and the reading process itself).

Another question raised by Snyder's observations on domestication theory is whether the effects of technologies, particularly as they relate to reading, include a commensurate decline in traditional reading. In the context of this research project, dealing with teenage reading, this question is worthy of consideration.

**Teenage Reading.**

Having considered the importance of reading for pleasure in relation to academic and civic success, and having observed that contemporary research is increasingly qualitative research
on what might be loosely described as the ‘affective factors’, another focus for consideration is what the research literature says about teenage voluntary reading. In examining this research it is important to note that much literature deals with teenage reading in the context of what else they do; in terms of the other demands on their time and the activities that they give priority to. The NEA (2007) and NLT (2008) projects contain sections about the importance of reading in relation to other activities. Nippold et al. (2005) in their article *Literacy as a Leisure Activity: Free-Time Preferences of Older Children and Young Adolescents*, surveyed 100 American students from ages 11 to 15. They found:

> For all students combined the most popular activities were listening to music/goi\nto concerts (78%), watching television or videos (77%), playing sports (68%), playing computer or video games (63%). Least popular were cooking (32%), running or walking (33%), writing (34%), and arts and crafts (38%). Reading (51%) was a moderately popular activity (p.96).

Another consideration in placing teenage reading in context is the increasing amount of ‘paid’ work teenagers do.

> Whereas in 1940 only about three percent of 16 year olds still at school were employed, by 1980 the government (US) estimated that more than 40 percent were working ... Large surveys that depend on student’s self-reports rather than government data indicate that in fact about 65 percent of today’s teens are gainfully employed (Fine et al. 1990, cited in Array, 2009).

The fact that teenagers lead busy lives and that this impacts on the amount of time available for voluntary reading is acknowledged in the literature. Richardson and Eccles (2007) observe that:

> From childhood through to young adulthood people engage in activities and practices that compete for their time and interest. ... It would be unusual to expect that reading habits remain stable throughout those life changes from childhood, into adolescence, later adolescence, and early adulthood (p.345).

An important, related, debate that occurs in the research literature is whether, overall, there is a decline in teenage reading. The 2004 report *Reading at Risk* announced that reading was in decline in the United States and that this decline was especially marked among young people. And yet as Stephen Krashen, Professor Emeritus at the University of Southern California, points out in a letter to the *School Library Journal* (June 2005, p.13) a Gallup Poll in January 2005 asked 1078 teenagers, ages 13 - 17, about the books they had read for pleasure over the last six months. 82 % said they had read at least one book. Whether one book in six months is an encouraging statistic is a moot point but certainly there is disagreement around the statistics pertaining to teenage reading.
What is not in doubt is the importance of early-life experiences in relation to later reading habits. There is a considerable body of research literature around the importance of children being read to early in life and relating to family and school literacy practices. One particularly pertinent example is Barwood's 2001 study of New Zealand teenagers which found that 83% of participants were encouraged to read by their families. This encouragement came mainly from mothers who were also the most avid readers in the home. Further, Barwood reported that family members gave the teenagers reading materials, 78% of males reporting that this was the case. Similarly another New Zealand study by Ann Williams in 2002 reported that:

Only 12% of the sample group came from a totally book free environment and some of their family members did read newspapers and magazines. A large majority (88%) had someone in the family who read either fiction or non-fiction books. However a pattern was evident that the women and girls in the family were the readers of books, especially fiction (p.24).

Another significant factor in the development of teenagers' reading habits and proclivities is the impact of schooling and the attitudes and input of teachers. As noted in the introductory section of this review there is widespread acceptance by teachers, particularly English teachers, of the importance and efficacy of both in-class reading instruction and, to a lesser degree, of reading for pleasure outside of school.

Putting aside the strictly educational benefits of reading such as increased vocabulary, better comprehension and improved writing skills, teachers attribute many, less quantifiable, benefits to reading. My own research in this area, published in English in Aotearoa, found that:

... a third of the teachers surveyed mentioned more abstract benefits associated with reading. Self-discipline, greater self-confidence, better concentration, increased general knowledge, more insights into life: all were raised as outcomes from personal reading (Taylor, 2002, p.61).

English teachers value reading and, presumably, promote it in their classrooms. However there is a tension between this positive endorsement of reading and assessment demands. Gebhard (2006) offers a bleak alternative in her plea for more reading for pleasure (here, specifically in the school setting):

Briefly consider this corollary. Current emphasis on standards-based instruction and increased preparation for high stakes assessment has dramatically shaped the reading curricula in today's classrooms. Reading basals often replace literature-
Based instruction and students rehearse test-taking skills by completing weekly multiple-choice tests about selected stories..." (p.460).

Gebhard’s stance is consistent with that of Louise Rosenblatt, mentioned above, and echoes Rosenblatt’s emphasis on the need for teachers to adopt an aesthetic approach to reading rather than a predominantly efferent one.

While not a key intent of this review the literature did provide other glimpses of unease with regard to the manner in which reading is promoted in schools. Knoester (2008) suggests that:

... independent reading is a social practice in significant ways, and students choose to read or not to read based not only on ability, nor solely on parental support, but also on complex questions of identity and interest in the cultivation of particular peer and adult relationships ... adolescents benefit if teachers view reading as a public act and use strategies that acknowledge reading as social (p.676).

Much of the research about reading is then, justifiably, school-based, focussed on younger children and often quantitative and utilitarian in that it is conducted in order to inform best practice and to support lifting literacy levels. In Aotearoa/New Zealand such research emanates from projects like the National Education Monitoring Programme (NEMP).

There is also considerable literature focussing on resistant, alliterate (reluctant, un-motivated) readers and struggling or remedial readers. It is argued, for instance, that what starts as a reluctance to read becomes an inability to read and that this pattern is reflected in a decline in reading for pleasure most obviously during adolescent years (Worthy, 1998). Key ideas in the literature surrounding reluctant and resistant teenage readers, particularly those at school, are ideas of identity and agency. At the time of adolescence teenagers become fiercely, sometimes irrationally, possessive of their independence. And yet, as Lenters (2006) observes; “Just as students are entering a time of life when increased autonomy is their desire, they simultaneously enter an instructional space where they have little or no choice in their school-based reading” (p.139).

In this observation, Lenters, whether consciously or not, harks back to Rosenblatt’s insistence on valuing individual responses to text and presumably (by implication) the value of allowing individual choice when selecting texts to read.
Richardson and Eccles develop the idea of individuality and identity in their article *Rewards of reading: Toward the development of possible selves and identities* (2007). The concept of 'possible selves' refers, as Markus and Nurius (1986) previously stated, to how individuals think about their potential and their future. Possible selves:

... represent specific individually significant hopes, fears and fantasies and while they are individualised they are also distinctly social being the direct result of previous social comparisons in which the individuals own thoughts, feelings, characteristics and behaviours have been contrasted to those of salient others (Markus & Nurius 1986, cited in Richardson & Eccles 2007, p.344).

This concept is particularly pertinent to adolescents because:

*An arena in which adolescents can safely try on and contemplate future selves in the world of work, romantic relationships, adventures, risks, success and failure, come to terms with discrimination, find strategies for navigating personal and social relations, and settle on personal values and beliefs, is through the reading they undertake voluntarily* (Richardson & Eccles, p.344).

The teenage sense of identity not only impacts on their desire for agency but also affects the purpose of their reading. Stereotypically, young men, particularly resistant readers, (it is argued) become more pragmatic in their approach to reading. They read increasingly on a 'need to know basis' while, stereotypically, female readers in the same category might turn to magazines and romance novels (Lenters, 2006).

Nippold & Larsen (2005) maintain that: “Despite the importance of reading for lexical development, little is known about the pleasure reading habits of today’s youth” (p.93) but this is not strictly true. What and how much teenagers read for pleasure, both at school and at home, is the subject of a range of studies. Two of the largest and most useful ones, those done by the NEA (2007) and the NLT (2008) have already been referred to. Williams’s (2000) New Zealand study of twenty five year nine students who had been classified as reluctant readers contained a section on reading for pleasure. A summary of findings noted that:

Surprisingly, 28% of the students chose to read every day. However, for 8% of these students it was the newspaper they read. Some (36%) said they read one to three times per week and the remaining 36% read once a month or less. Almost half of the sample group (48%) said they did not read fiction books and 40% said they did read fiction but not very often. The remaining 12% who did read fiction were all girls (p. 23).

More difficult to locate is extensive research on the interface between the use of digital literacy at home and its impact on school. Snyder (2008) asserts that “Research examining the
complex connections between school literacies and out—of—school literacies has provided insight for teachers about the experience and knowledge students bring to formal studies in school” (p.19), but only refers to two studies, by Gee (2003) and Jenkins (2006), looking at computer games and literacy learning, by way of evidence.

The influence of gender features in many studies into teenage reading. Typically the broad studies such as those done by the Clarke, et al. (2006) and NEA (2007) contain sections on gender. The NLT’s 2008 study of young people’s self-perceptions as readers includes the statement:

*There are a plethora of explanations in the literature for the apparent underachievement of boys, including discussions of biological/cognitive differences, differential parent treatment, changing masculinities, school curriculum and teaching and learning. The academic performance of boys in schools, particularly in the area of literacy, is of growing concern to researchers and educators (Clark et al. p.35).*

This “concern” continues to generate general debate in New Zealand but there does not appear to be specific, recent literature on boys’ reading available.

**Themes.**

Reflecting on the vast array of contemporary literature which deals with reading as a universal concept it appears to me that there are two interwoven, ‘umbrella’ themes. The first of these themes, which I have chosen to label; *Reading under threat*, is characterised by alarmism and conflicting data. The second, *Inevitable evolution*, acknowledges, more explicitly, the changing nature of reading and the certainty that traditional and digital reading are increasingly complementing each other, particularly in the real worlds of teenagers. The second theme is characterised by literature chronicling concern, resistance and even alleging conspiracy.

**Reading under threat**

The first of these ‘umbrella themes’ is the ‘alarmist view’ of reading that articulates the decline of reading, particularly the reading of books.

“Another universal pattern (in the research) is that as soon as popular reading culture gets established, commentators start worrying about the decline of reading” (Griswold et al. p.129). This appears to be true of every country. In China the People’s Daily reported that, in
2004, Chinese people were reading less according to a new survey. (Cited in Griswold et al. 2005) while educated Africans reading cultures established in the late colonial and early independence periods were being eroded (Griswold, 2000). There is, however, an irony inherent in this alarmism as Armando Petrucci (1999) observes:

*Oddly enough, the loudest cries of alarm come from areas where the production and distribution of printed texts is the liveliest and where printing reaches the broadest variety of social groups - the United States and Europe - rather than Africa or Latin America (pp.352-353).*

Possibly the most passionate harbinger of the death of reading is Birkerts, who, as early as 1994, sounded the death knell of reading in his book *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. In a series of essays with titles such as *The Death of Literature* and *Into the Electronic Millennium*, Birkerts laments the decline both of serious books and serious readers and sets out the cultural and spiritual price that will be paid as we move into a digital age.

There is, however some confusion in the reported statistics, particularly as they pertain to books. The NLT report (2006) reports that there is evidence that the book market is growing fast with book sales having risen 30% since the mid 1990s and that both fiction and non-fiction books are read in the majority of British households. The report goes on to say that:

*A 2006 BBC survey of 4000 adults on reading habits in the UK showed that 82% of adults enjoyed reading. Reading was rated as more popular than sex (well, for women at least) and watching TV but lagged behind spending time with friends and family, and listening to music (p.7).*

It is noticeable that these particular findings do not delineate between reading of books and other traditional texts, a complicating factor noted above in the comment regarding the pronouncement made by the NEA Chairman, Dana Gioia. Further, this finding seems to contradict other international statistics. Sherman Young in his 2007 book, *the book is dead. long live the book* provides an array of figures to illustrate the decline in book reading. He cites Richard Charkin, CEO of Macmillan Publishers in the UK, as having observed that 40% of Europeans do not read books; he cites an NEA (2004) report to prove that by the end of this decade less than half of the American population would have read a (one) book in the course of a year and refers to the Australian Bureau of Statistics which reports that the average Australian spends seven minutes a day reading books.
Certainly the NEA report (2007), drawing on figures reported by the Book Industry Study Group in the United States reports that by 2006 unit sales for consumer books were down 100 million from 2000, with 1.5 billion books sold and that "... the average annual amount that American families spend on books is at a 20 year low" (p.49).

This picture of decline is complicated by yet another set of figures however – those relating to book production. Petrucci (1999) for instance, uses UNESCO figures to assert that book production is (or at least was) strongly on the rise. The number of book titles produced in 1975 was 572,000 but this rose to 772,000 by 1983.

Apart from the issue of whether reading undertaken is predominantly of books or other forms of traditional text and whether such reading is declining, a further complicating factor that is inherent in some of the literature about reading is the matter of what types of books are being read. This is a complex and sensitive matter since it touches upon the issue both of 'taste' and socio-economic status. Wright (2006) raises this (historically situated) matter when he states:

> A concern with reading, then, can be conceptualised not simply as a concern with whether or not people read at all but also, if they do read, whether the types of reading they are engaged in are 'correct' or somehow wasteful or corrosive (p.125).

Indeed Rose (2007) develops this recurring theme when he, in seeking to link the history of reading to the history of education, points out:

> We have been told time and time again, from all points of the ideological compass, that the common reader cannot be trusted to read intelligently. The masses will be misled by Enlightenment philosophy or romantic fiction or penny dreadful or advertising or mass culture or middlebrow culture. One can trace this fear back at least as far as the Reformation and the anxieties aroused by unrestricted reading of vernacular bibles ... (p.601).

Sherman Young (2007) goes in a slightly different direction and more bluntly. In analysing book buying statistics he identifies three overlapping categories: 'functional books', 'anti-books' and 'books' and argues that the number of 'books' "... that are engaging and meant to be read" (p.51) that are sold are, in essence, very few; around 30% of total sales if UK figures (2002) are representative of book-buying trends. While this is a provocative stance it does raise a legitimate point regarding the fact that book sale figures are not necessarily indicative of actual reading being done.
While the literature about how much is being read and what is being read by whom, points toward issues of cultural capital and socio-economic status there is also, inevitably, a 'political', (the word being used here in a general sense) aspect to the debate around reading. And here the alarmist view is complemented by an almost conspiratorial aspect. Luke and Luke (2001) offer perhaps the most contentious view of the politics of reading as it pertains to education in Australia (and surely New Zealand?), the United Kingdom and the United States:

... that the crises of print literacy and their preferred ameliorative social strategies are being used as a nodal point in public discourse both to delay and sublimate the emergence of new educational paradigms around multi-literacies, around new blended forms of textual and symbolic practice and affiliated modes of identity and social relations, and to forestall a substantive debate over the implications such shifts might have for an aging, creaky, industrial, print-based schooling infrastructure (p.96).

The argument here then is that the alarm around the decline in publishing and ‘real’ reading is masking the issue of how society, and in particular schools, should accommodate digital literacies and that this alarm is being used deliberately to delay the fundamental change necessary for such an accommodation.

*Inevitable evolution.*

This perspective leads us to consider the second, related overarching theme in the literature around reading. The changing nature of reading is increasingly prevalent in recent writing on the subject. Here some radical and far reaching implications are posited. One of the most interesting and concerning of these is the impact of digital culture on deep reading and indeed on thinking. Wolf and Barzillai in their article *The Importance of Deep Reading* (2009) put this proposition in a historical context by comparing the transition period modern readers are in with a similar historical shift at the time of the ancient Greeks. They argue (with reference to Aristotle’s criteria as to how a culture can be judged):

*The digital learner seems particularly well-suited for a life of activity and a life of enjoyment. The emphases of digital media on efficient, massive information processing; flexible multi-tasking; quick and interactive modes of communication; and seemingly endless forms of digitally based entertainment encourage such lives. These emphases, however, can be less suited for the slower, more time-consuming, cognitive processes that are vital for contemplative life and are at the heart of what we call deep reading (p.33).*

Wolf and Barzillai further argue that the move to a digitally dominated society, and presumably a consequently digitally driven education system “... may radically change how we learn to read and acquire information. And they may change how we think” (p.33).
In relation to this statement it is useful to consider the literature around the phenomena of multi-tasking. Multi-tasking appears to be the most visible of the evolving psychomotor and cognitive trends seen in the area of teenage ‘reading’ (in the very broadest sense of that word).

In 2007 Stone coined the term ‘continual partial attention’ and Gasser and Palfrey in a 2009 article *Mastering Multitasking* assembled the results of a number of studies into the extent and effects of multi-tasking on digital natives. Citing a comprehensive study by Foehr (2006) which found that 80% of young people between 8 and 18 multi-tasked while using media, they also reported that according to Levine, Waite and Bowman (2007) instant messaging is likely to create a cognitive style “... based on quick, superficial multitasking” (p.565). Gasser and Palfrey conclude that: “... multiple, sometimes simultaneous, use of digital technologies can have deleterious effects on thinking and learning” (p.19) and urge educators to: “... give students the opportunity to experience a contemplative environment” (p.19).

While academics like Wolf and Barzillai and Gasser and Palfrey link their concerns about the changing landscape of reading and its associated complexities to evolution, brain science and thought processes, Birkerts had previously made a more subjective, nostalgic case:

> As the printed book, and the ways of the book- of reading and writing – are modified, as electronic communications assert dominance, the “feel” of the literary engagement is altered. Reading and writing come to mean differently; they acquire new significations. As the world hurtles on towards its mysterious rendezvous, the old act of slowly reading a book becomes an elegiac exercise (1994, p.6).

Of course, not all the consequences of the increasing use of digital literacies (particularly by young people) are regarded by those working in the field as negative. Knobel and Wilber (2009), speaking of the interactive nature of Web 2.0 write: “The Web 2.0 ethos values and promotes three interlocking functions and practices: participation, collaboration and distribution” (p.21). They point to the fact that, because of the digital technologies available and in contrast to what teenagers do in school literacy-wise, outside of school many students are “... accomplished authors, film-makers, animators and recording artists” (p.23) and argue further:

> ... many young people’s online literacy practices engage them in exactly the kind of learning that educators value, in terms of quality of work, narrative power, character development, logic and concept development. Literacy 2.0 is grounded in achieving authentic purposes and completing meaningful tasks. Unfortunately
it does not mesh well with practices such as book reports, comprehension questions, levelled reading tasks, and weekly spelling tests that students are asked to do in school (p.24).

Luke and Luke characterise the angst over the decline of print literacy and the blaming of technology for this, as well as the associated resistance to embracing the possibilities of multi-literacies, in political and social terms, arguing: "... the continued crisis in early print literacy has become a default stalling tactic by educational systems that are unable to come to grips generationally and practically with multi-literacies and increasingly alien and alienated student bodies (2001, p.96).

Lemke and Coughlin (2009) offer further encouragement to educators who wish to embrace digital literacies, maintaining that they offer benefits such as the democratisation of knowledge, participatory learning, authentic learning and multi-model learning.

Crucially then, recent literature around literacy in general, and reading in particular, reveals an increasing emphasis on the need to acknowledge the interface between digital and traditional reading within the education system. Further there is a hope that established reading skills and proclivities can be harnessed during the evolution of the new literacy. Typical of this literature is the work of Burke and Rowsell (2008):

Our case studies highlight the complexity of digital reading practices of young adolescents and the critical skills they need to comprehend interactive texts. While both traditional and digital texts may transport the reader to other times and other spaces, it is important to consider how reading pathways contribute to comprehension within particular digital texts. This research calls for educators to re-examine their perceptions of what it means to be literate in a technological world, but also how reading instruction should hone the nuanced skills required to read digital texts critically (p.455).

Again, Ohler (2009) argues that traditional literacy such as reading and writing is needed to support developing digital literacy and, addressing educators, advises that: "... a well rounded approach to the new media collage requires the blending of a number of literacies" (p.12). Wolf and Barzillai (2009) appear to agree that there is a way that digital reading might complement traditional reading and the associated complex thinking and element of contemplation required in a healthy society, if educators encourage, for instance, deep reading on-line. Springer (2009) agrees, urging parents and educators to facilitate balance in teenager’s lives by providing reflection time at home and school, letting teenagers be the teachers in technological contexts and by actively building emotional literacy. These
interfaces between home and school and between traditional and digital reading are of course increasingly blurred:

Adolescents engage in a variety of literacy practices to communicate, acquire new information and produce diverse texts. Literacy practitioners and researchers are identifying more and more examples of diverse non-school reading and writing, as well as the emergence of new ways of meaning making associated with new media and technologies. As the evidence continues to demonstrate, adolescents’ disparate literacy worlds cannot and should not continue to be dichotomized in their literacy learning experiences (Vasudevan, 2007, p.253).

Conclusion: toward further research

Reading in its universal sense is, of course, a gigantic topic. The socio-cultural, historical, political and economic contexts in which reading resides and permeates are dynamic. Matters of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, gender, government policy, educational opportunity and personal motivation are amongst those factors that impinge upon and inform the practice of reading. The research practices and consequent literature are also complex and dynamic.

Most research activities and policy developments have primarily focussed on the cognitive aspects of reading, such as word recognition and comprehension. However it is becoming increasingly apparent that purely cognitive accounts of reading are incomplete - just because someone is able to read does not mean that he or she will do so (Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p.7).

That reading for pleasure, as we have traditionally conceived of it, is ‘at risk’ seems undeniable. Comprehensive, recent syntheses of data from such agencies as the NLT (2006) and NEA (2007) suggest distinct trends, particularly relevant to those who are engaged in teaching or researching teenagers. Essentially these trends suggest that there is “... a historical decline in voluntary reading rates among teenagers and young adults; a gradual worsening of reading skills among young teens; and declining proficiency in adult readers” (NEA, p.94). Allied to these trends, and taking into account all of the complex factors that impact on reading, is the inevitability of change. Change in the way we read, what we read, how reading affects our thinking and our relationships; all of these trends are reflected in recent research literature, some of which has been canvassed here.

The young people of today are the evolving embodiment of that change and their reading endeavours, attitudes and beliefs are thus, surely, worthy of ongoing investigation and respect.
Suddenly it feels like everything is poised for change; the slower world that many of us grew up with dwindles in the rear view mirror. The stable hierarchies of the printed page – one of the defining norms of that world – are being superseded by the rush of impulses through freshly minted circuits. The displacement of the page by the screen is not yet total, it may never be total, but the large scale tendency in that direction has to be obvious to anyone who looks (Birket, 1994, p.3).
In writing the history of the early reading brain, I was surprised to realise that questions raised more than two millennia ago by Socrates about literacy address many concerns of the early twenty first century. I came to see that Socrates’ worries about the transition from an oral culture to a literate one and the risks it posed, especially for young people, mirrored my own concerns about the immersion of our children into a digital world (Wolf, 2008).

The researcher’s ‘working’ research question was:
What do teenagers read and what do they think about reading?

This question arose from my desire to broaden my understanding of teenage reading in general or, as Turnbull states, “The driver for the topic is likely to be determined by the researcher’s motives, which if they are rooted in social constructionism, will be interpretive and explanatory” (2002, p.323).

The question was framed in the broadest terms possible in order to facilitate an emergent research design and to take account of my determination to co-construct the project with the participants as fully as possible. Nevertheless in undertaking the research I anticipated that four broad areas within the parameters of the working research question would be canvassed.

These were:
1. What and how much do teenagers read outside of school?
2. What and how much ‘other’ reading (namely digital reading) do teenagers do?
3. What other factors impact on teenage reading?
4. What attitudes and beliefs do teenagers have about reading?

In actuality, all of these questions were encompassed and superseded by the first question I asked the participants at the first group interview meeting, which was:

R: Ok, so if you were me and embarking on this project and you wanted to find out about teenage reading what would you want to know?
Research Question

**Theoretical framework**

This research sits within a socio-cultural – historical context. Crotty (1998) and Mutch (2005) remind us that research does not take place in a vacuum but is always situated in a social setting and in a historical context. Larsen and Marsh concur, saying: “Socio-cultural-historical learning theory defines the child as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems” (2005, p.100). From my point of view this over-arching view provides a context that allows me to pursue “...a culturally focussed analysis of participation in everyday life, in both formal and informal learning settings” (Larsen & Marsh, 2005 p.101) and to place the reading teenagers do in the broader context of their busy, multi-faceted lives.

More particularly, and for personal and academic reasons, this research project is firmly located in a social constructionist paradigm. Crotty, in his book *The Foundations of Social Research; Meanings and Perspectives in the Research Process* (1998) defines constructionism as “... the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p.42). My background in education generally and particularly as a teacher of literature and an advisor on literacy convinces me that this is indeed so. Both the theoretical framework and the consequent methodology described below are additionally based on my belief that social constructionists are bound “... to acknowledge and seek to understand the intimate relationship between the researcher and the researched, the situational constraints that shape inquiry and the value-laden nature of inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln,1994, cited in Turnbull, 2002, p.320).

Initially, I conceived of this research project as one located firmly and exclusively in a qualitative research paradigm. As a teacher and teacher educator (and now beginning researcher) whose professional life has been guided by an idealistic and humanist instinct, I believe that “... multiple-constructed realities abound, that time and context free generalisations are neither desirable nor possible, that research is value-bound” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.16). Further, Guba’s (1990) qualitative stance that the knower and the known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality struck me as eminently sensible and also complemented my own belief in what Maykut and Morehouse (1994) describe as “... human plurality”, the conceiving of humans as “.... distinct
from and equal to all other humans” (p.27). Specifically then, my dominant theoretical stance in this project was that of a ‘soft relativist’, that is one who has a “... respect and interest in understanding and depicting individual and social group differences (i.e., their different perspectives) and a respect for democratic approaches to group opinion” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.16).

Qualitative research, alternatively described as “naturalistic inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) seeks to investigate what actually happens in society and to gain an insight into human perceptions. Qualitative research seeks to uncover these realities and insights in a way that is “...untainted by the obtrusiveness of formal measurement or categories” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Additionally Turnbull’s perspective as articulated in her article Social Construction Research and Theory Building (2002) is that “Qualitative researchers are more interested in depth than breadth” (p.318) and Maykut and Morehouse’s (1994) assertion that “... the outcome (of qualitative research) is not the generalisation of results but a deeper understanding of experience from the perspective of the participants selected for the study” (p.4), informed my research intent from the beginning.

During the planning stages of the project, however, it became obvious that in order to get richer data and a deeper understanding of the contexts in which teenagers live and consequently read, I would need to gather data using a range of methods. While the research would seek to give primary importance to the voices of the participants, other information about their lives would more easily be gathered and analysed by using a quantitative approach, for instance, in the form of a Reading Log.

In summary then, while my stance was firmly located within a primarily qualitative framework a more accurate description of the paradigm of my project is that it is a mixed methods research project.

Mixed methods research is an emerging, third wave paradigm sourced in the pragmatist philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey. Recent proponents of the mixed methods research paradigm are R. Burke Johnson and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie (2004) who define the paradigm as: “... the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (p.17).
Apart from having practical reasons for combining research methods (such as triangulation of data and providing equitable opportunities for all to participate) and seeking a clearer picture of the participants overall lives, the mixed methods paradigm appealed to me as an "... expansive and creative form of research, not a limiting form of research" (Johnson & Onwuegubuzie, p.17) and one that was well suited to working with teenage participants in that it is "... inclusive and pluralistic" (p.17). Further, I was concerned to keep the scope of the study broad yet focussed on the research questions, fluid yet productive; so a mixed methods approach provided me with some solid bases from which to conduct the research while allowing the freedom of a co-constructed, emergent design.
CHAPTER FOUR
Methodology

Overview
This section of the report begins by discussing a number of concepts and considerations that were pivotal in the development and execution of the research project. Following this there is a section on Method which outlines the nature of the sample, how it was recruited and the strategies and tools employed in eliciting data from it. The Methodology chapter concludes with sections on data analysis and ethical considerations.

Two further points are pertinent to the reading of this chapter. In order that the reader might gain an immediate overview of what the researcher actually did in this project I note here, briefly, the key data collection methods used. These methods are detailed on pages 41 – 48.

The participants met with the researcher and assistant moderator four times in a group interview format. Initially they completed a Reader Profile and later filled out a Reading Log. During the group interviews the sample participated in several interactive activities, including peer interviews, in order that the researcher could gain deeper insights into their attitudes and beliefs with regard to reading.

Secondly; throughout this report I have used ‘P’ for participant, and numbered them one (1) to six (6) to identify the participants except where the transcribed tape was indistinct. In such cases I have merely reverted to the use of ‘P’ to indicate participant. I have identified Assistant Moderator as ‘AM’ and myself as ‘R’.

Co-construction and emergent design
Having adopted the theoretical position that in qualitative studies the researcher must acknowledge how their “... age, gender, social class, ethnicity or culture, geographical location, life experience and current status influence their research decisions” (Mutch, 2005, p.63) and being determined to ensure that the voices of the participants were accorded primacy (both of these decisions are amplified below) it was obvious that that I must adopt a
co-constructive approach to the project. Such an approach also clearly had the potential to militate against any ethical ambivalence I might feel about ‘exploiting’ the teenagers in the research process. Like Frost (1995) I felt concerned about the role and comparative status of the research participants from an ethical point of view. Clearly one way to avoid compromising the relationship was is to make sure that the design and evolution of the research project was the result of joint planning and action (Day, 1995) and that the participants were comfortable with it from the start.

**Researcher/moderator as learner**

Initial background reading on the role of the researcher in general and of the role of a ‘focus group’ moderator in particular, led me to approach the first group interview meeting intent on assuming the traditional role of ‘researcher as learner’ and to limit my input strictly to that of a ‘moderator’. Richard Kruegger’s (1994) advice that I should be a guide in the discussion rather than a participant seemed credible. During the first meeting however it became apparent that the participants were, to some degree at least, interested in learning more about reading themselves rather than merely giving their own opinions. I gained the impression that the participants were, in reality, interested in establishing a ‘dialogue’ with me. They wanted a ‘discussion’ and they were quite happy for me to be involved in that discussion.

Participant (P): Can I ask a question?

Researcher (R): Please do

P: You know the way you (R) said that in America they think that.... you know.... there is a lot of computer use......what is the difference between reading off a book and reading off the computer? You can read a novel on the internet.

Therefore I decided to adapt my role from “low intervention” to “medium intervention” (Morgan, 1997, p. 54) and to occasionally share information or thoughts that might be of mutual interest to all involved. Relevant here also is the fact that as the research process evolved and as my own understanding of the group dynamic, and my place in it, developed, I increasingly conceived of the meetings not as ‘focus groups’ but as ‘group interviews’ (a distinction discussed below).
More crucially, further complementary reading around the precepts of qualitative research convinced me of the validity and importance of the concept of the researcher assuming the posture of ‘indwelling’.

**Indwelling:**

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) define indwelling as existing

... as an interactive spirit force or principle. It literally means to live within... being at one with the persons under investigation, walking a mile in the other person's shoes, or understanding the person's point of view from an empathetic rather than a sympathetic position (p. 25).

While, for reasons of (for example) age, gender, relative educational positioning, I might struggle to “walk a mile” in the shoes of the participants, it seemed imperative that I should adopt a theoretical stance and a consequent methodologically flexible approach that might enable me to gain insights into the teenage milieu.

These theoretical realisations had immediate consequences in terms of the evolving research process, particularly in the area of the data collection tools and strategies used and most specifically in the adoption of the ‘human as instrument’ concept.

**Human as instrument:**

“Human as instrument simply means that it is the person with all of her or his skills, experience, background and knowledge as well as biases which is the primary, if not exclusive source of all data collection and analysis” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 26), or as Glesne and Peshken (1992) had previously stated; ‘The researcher becomes the main research instrument as he or she, observes, asks questions and interacts with the research participants.” (p.6). This concept was coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who believed that “... a person is the only instrument which is flexible enough to capture the complexity, subtlety and constantly changing situation which is human experience.” (cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p.26) and sat comfortably with my acceptance of indwelling in particular.

In general then, these shifts, early in the research process, sat more easily both with my own teaching background and with my inherent philosophical instincts that, as Haverkamp and Young (2007) argue, the researcher should be, and is inevitably, in the research process. This point of view, which encompasses the idea of research being undertaken through the lens of the researcher, is endorsed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Mutch (2005) and Sulentic-Dowell
et al. (2006). The participants also, seemingly, became comfortable with the idea of me participating in the development of ideas. For instance, as noted above, at the end of focus group meeting three one participant asked me; “What’s the most interesting thing that you’ve learnt so far, just out of curiosity?” Consequently a spontaneous discussion ensued around what the researcher had learned. This is reported more fully in the Discussion Chapter of the report.

**Participant Voices**

Apart from my realisations that, as a researcher, I would inevitably be in the research and be viewing the participants and the generated data through a particular lens and my decision to attempt to be an indweller, my other major methodological concern in approaching the project was according primacy to the participant voices. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state; “To understand the world under investigation, people’s words and actions are used by qualitative researchers” (p.18) and, in answer to the question “Why words?” continue:

> Words are the way most people come to understand their situations. We create our worlds with words. We explain ourselves with words. We defend and hide ourselves with words. The task of the qualitative researcher is to find patterns within those words and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it (p.18).

Having acknowledged the centrality and potential power of the participant voice in this project I was consequently concerned to avoid the situation where I might be seen to be unfairly ‘using’ the participants.

Indeed, I hoped that participation in the project might inform and engage participants both in the process and the substance of our combined endeavours. A similar sentiment was articulated by Taber (2003) writing about educational research in general: “Education is potentially an empowering and democratic process, and yet much education research seems to use evidence acquired from students as if researchers have an unproblematic right to acquire, interpret and publish the words of students” (p.35). I agree with Taber when he writes;

> Yet, if researchers value the people they work with as research informants (or ‘subjects’) then there is a case for letting their voices be heard in reports of the research. Furthermore, extended verbatim quotations may not only give greater acknowledgment to the original source of the data, but may also provide users of the research with the power of the direct quotation to capture succinctly and...
Because of this, student voices are reported extensively in the Findings chapter of this report.

**Use of an Assistant Moderator**

As part of the group interview process an Assistant Moderator was used. While I had abandoned the idea of characterising myself as a moderator (and indeed had moved away from the concept of a focus group approach in general) I felt that an assistant moderator role was still valid. The role would primarily involve being an observer and consultant (Krueger, 1998). However there were several other justifications for the role that I considered during the planning phase of the project and subsequently utilised during the process. These were four-fold. The assistant moderator would provide some form of continuity or ongoing moderation in the event that there was more than one interview group used or that the elapsed time between group interviews was such that comparative questioning and consequent discussion might be difficult. Further, the assistant moderator might take field-notes that informed and consolidated data gathered through recording and this in fact did occur during the first meeting in particular. The assistant moderator assisted with the logistics of the group meetings and, finally, was invaluable during de-briefings; suggesting adaptations and additions that the researcher might make in future meetings. The presence of the assistant moderator at meetings and her less obvious, less formalised role in assuring the affective comfort and safety of both researcher and participants is discussed further in the Ethical Considerations section of this report.

**Method**

**Sample**

The participants in this research project were young people who were senior students at a large, urban, co-educational Catholic school (decile 8) in the southern part of New Zealand. While the project was not a school-based one, the school was used for recruiting purposes. A further, broader consideration was the need to ensure that productive discussion might take place and here I was guided by Morgan's (1997) injunction that sampling should seek homogeneity in "background" (though not "attitude") so that good discussion can take place
Methodology

(p.36). The assumption made in seeking this sample was that the participants would likely be 'readers' although this was not stipulated during recruitment of the sample.

My initial intention was to have a sample of ten (10) young people, preferably five females and five males. I thought that this sample might be divided into two sub-groups that would run parallel, with the facility to have one session in groups divided along gender lines. The rationale for such divisions was to enable full and frank contributions to be made in groups which, in theory, would also be more inclusive. In practice, due to some difficulty during the recruiting process, this initial intention had to be modified. In retrospect Turnbull's (2002) advice proved timely and sensible;

It is tempting to try and include too much, as a qualitative study can easily grow beyond all recognition. ... If in doubt, reduce the size and scope of your study to achieve the richness of data and understanding you are seeking. Big numbers are not needed or even desirable in social constructionist research (p. 324).

Method of recruiting

Having gained the permission of the school Principal (see Appendix three) to recruit senior students for the project, I addressed a Form Group meeting of the Year 13 cohort at the school, outlining the project, answering questions from staff and students and inviting prospective participants to collect information sheets and consent forms. This initial contact generated only a minimal response with two consent forms (See Appendices one and two) being returned at the end of that week. An additional Year 13 student joined the study some days later.

I then approached the head of the English department and gained permission to address a year 12 English class and as a result of this and some informal urging from teachers at the school a further three participants were confirmed.

The difficulty experienced in gathering together a sample of senior teenagers might be explained by two factors, both conjectural but both relevant to the study being conducted. The students spoken to were all very busy. It is estimated that 70% of the school population has jobs (and this would be proportionally higher among senior students), the school production was in full-swing and National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) commitments were pressing. A second possible reason for the reluctance of students to
commit to participation in the project may have been to do with peer perception. On both recruitment occasions some form of public commitment to participating (and thus by implication some degree of acknowledgment that the participants liked reading) was required and this may explain the limited and somewhat wary response.

**Sources of Data: Strategies and Tools**

I chose to use a range of data collection methods. Having decided that my research sat squarely in a socio-cultural-historical context and having adopted a mixed methods social constructionist paradigm, I needed to be cognisant of, and probe, the variety of factors that influence teenager’s lives and the various ‘communities’ in which they live. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) observe; “Qualitative research values context sensitivity, that is, understanding a phenomena in all its complexity and within a particular situation and environment” (p.13). Larsen and Marsh (2005) on the other hand, remind us; “From a socio-cultural-historical perspective, community is expanded to include the larger society as a community of practice or, multiple communities of practice, to which children are being socialised on multiple level” (p.106) My research therefore, acknowledged that the participants participate in multiple communities simultaneously (these being, for example, home, school, work and ‘play’ contexts) and that data I collected needed to be of a commensurate, diverse and layered nature. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) provide support for this approach too, suggesting that a researcher must use any data that they can, to facilitate answers to their research questions. A further justification of this pragmatic approach to qualitative research is found in Denzin and Lincoln (1994). They state that “... the combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth and depth to any investigation” (p2).

I define strategies here as those data collection methods that are interactive and tools as those methods that rely on individual completion, separate from the group. As noted above, in this study the tools used were further divided into qualitative and quantitative methods.
Group Interviews

A major, initial decision was that relating to the use of the group interview strategy to collect data.

Fontana and Frey (2000) define the group interview as "... essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that relies upon the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting" (p.651). A survey of the literature illustrates some debate about the definition of group interviews. Fontana and Frey themselves noted that "... the group interview has ordinarily been associated with marketing research under the label of focus group" (p.651). Focus group was a term coined by Merton, Fiske and Kendall in 1956 to apply to "... a situation in which the researcher/interviewer asks very specific questions about a topic after having already completed considerable research (cited in Fontana & Frey, p.651).

Because my input into the interview situation was not intended to be overly directive and nor had I completed significant previous research into the topics discussed, it would be incorrect for me to use the term focus group. I have thus used the term 'group interview' and, adapting the criteria provided by Fontana and Frey (1991), characterise that term as I have employed it as being; "... a semi-formal small group field interview in a pre-set location with a semi-structured question format" (p.652). In reality the group interviews that took place were more like "... a group conversation with a purpose" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p.104).

I felt that the main advantage of the group interview situation could be that the participants would support one another in offering ideas and opinions that they would not necessarily feel comfortable expressing in an individual interview. This view is endorsed by Morgan (1997).

The major consideration in adopting the group interview technique was the need to evoke 'real', wide-ranging responses. Thus while group interviews have both advantages and disadvantages, I felt that overall they were suited to my research project since I wanted the process to be "... geared to the uncovering of many idiosyncratic but nonetheless important stories told by real people, about real events, in real and natural ways" (Ismail, 2006, p.42). Similarly the concept of like-minded teenage acquaintances talking together about a common interest in a familiar setting seemed sound and likely to produce "...rich data that are cumulative and elaborative" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.652).
The sample or Interview Group then met four times, on June 17, July 29 and August 26 and September 28 2008. The meetings were conducted in the school library, for one hour, directly after school. While this research project was not intended to be related directly to the school, or to school reading generally, the compromise of having the meetings at school, after school, was made for logistical reasons. It was felt that this would make it easier for the participants to attend and that any potential issues of security and safety (such as travel in the winter months) would be lessened. My previous experience of working with teenagers suggested that limiting each meeting to one hour would be sensible, a view endorsed by Glesne and Peshken (1992); “An hour of steady talk is a useful rule of thumb to guide appropriate length before diminishing returns may set in for both parties” (p.73).

The participants appeared comfortable with the arrangements and the fact that most of the students attended the meetings dressed in their school uniforms did not seem to inhibit them or in any way bring an ‘institutionalised tone’ to the meetings. Indeed, as these teenagers were senior students at the school (some having been at the school for 7 years) the school library was a natural, familiar setting for them and the fact that the meetings took place surrounded by books seemed appropriate. In all these respects the setting mirrored the theoretical perspective provided by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) that: “The natural setting is the place where the research is most likely to discover, or uncover what is to be known about the phenomenon of interest” (p45).

The meetings took place in a light and airy space at the back of the library. The space was closed off from the main library by folding doors during the meetings and was thus quiet and secluded, apart from very occasional, brief intrusions by the school librarian and the school caretaker. The participants were seated in a circle, on low chairs around similarly low tables upon which were food and the recording equipment.

**Interactive Strategies**

As a result of the first group interview meeting I realised that my approach to, and relationship with, the participants was bound to be more complex than I had at first anticipated. As noted above it was obvious that the participants wished to engage in dialogue with me and, further, that because the participants were comfortable with each other and with the setting, that interactive strategies might be usefully employed to evoke contributions from
the group. Three such strategies were used in the course of the focus group meetings. These were 'Clines', 'One and All' and Peer Interviews.

**Clines:** In group interview meeting three the participants were asked to participate in an activity intended to interrogate their attitudes toward genres of literature and their reading preferences in relation to those genres. The Cline strategy (see Appendix F) was one that I had adapted from my work in pre-service and in-service literacy workshops. A cline is "...a graded sequence of words, usually on a sloping line. (The word cline derives from the Greek word *clino* - to slope.) Constructing a cline involves arranging words in a continuum that indicates their degrees of shade or meaning" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, p.41). In the context of this project the participants were given a range of literary genres and asked to place these on a cline in order to show which of these they genres they considered to be most 'worthy' and which least. The genres provided were: poetry, magazines, science-fiction, plays, newspapers, classics, crime, historical novels, fantasy, and biography-autobiography. This activity mirrored a data gathering strategy used in the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion (CCSE) project that took place in the United Kingdom. Wright (2006) reported on a task where respondents were asked to rank their preferred genre from one to seven, where one meant 'I like it a lot' and seven meant 'I did not like it at all'. The genres included in the CCSE study were similar to mine, except, most notably, their list included religious books and self-help books.

The concept of 'worthiness' as I introduced it to the participants was somewhat problematic:

- **R:** Now when I say worthy you might not necessarily enjoy them particularly, but you might see that they are worthwhile type of things that readers read.
- **P:** So it's not for us?
- **P:** It's not our opinion?
- **R:** Yes, it's your perception.
- **P:** What you think is most kinda academic...

Despite this initial confusion the clines were filled out with due care and careful consideration.

In the second part of the activity, and by way of comparison, the participants were asked to rank those same genres according to their personal preference.
Perception of a reader activity (One and All): In the third focus group meeting participants undertook an activity to look at the perceptions people might have of readers. Such perceptions had been alluded to in previous discussions and the researcher wanted to probe this aspect further. The strategy used is commonly called either ‘One and All’ or ‘The Negotiation Game’.

Again I had used this activity in my own teaching, namely to discuss stereotypical views of adolescents as part of a Teaching and Learning paper at tertiary level. A more specific justification is suggested by Williams (2004):

*I then simply write the word reader on the chalkboard and ask students to provide me with all the words they associate with that term. Words such as loner, nerd, boring, relaxed, escape, smart and alone show up and we talk about what experiences and cultural values lead them to these words (p.3).*

The five participants present at the third interview group meeting were divided into two groups and each group was given an A3 sheet of paper and some marker pens. The sheets of paper had been prepared in template form. Participants were asked to individually list words that might describe people who were ‘good’ or ‘enthusiastic’ readers. These words could relate to their own perceptions or record stereotypical perceptions that they were aware of. Participants were to place these words in the area of the A3 sheet allocated for them to record their personal observations. Following this phase of the activity participants explained and discussed the words they had recorded and by a process of negotiation agreed which key words or phrases would be placed in the centre of the A3 sheet as a record of the group’s consensus.

The advantages of this strategy in gathering data were two-fold. The strategy allowed all participants to contribute and justify their ideas and to have those ideas valued by being recorded on the group’s sheet. Secondly, and importantly in this context, it allowed participants to build a stereotypical picture of a reader through a mechanism that ensured those stereotypes (particularly negative ones) were not being attributed directly to the participants themselves. In this research context extra ‘safety’ was ensured by the fact that the participants knew each other, were mutually supportive and appeared to possess a common sense of humour.
Peer Interviews: In preparing for the fourth and final group interview meeting I was concerned to ensure that all the participants had had every opportunity to contribute their ideas and to have these valued. In addition I was once again mindful of wanting to constructively erode, or at least manage, the power relationship between researcher and participants. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) observed: “In his writings, Elliot Mishler (1986), a social psychologist and qualitative researcher, emphasises the importance of reducing the power differential between the researcher and the research participant by involving the participants as collaborators.” (p.71). I wanted to ensure that my collaborators were fully empowered even at this late stage in the process.

It was therefore decided to make time for ‘peer interviews’ where the participants would interview each other and the researcher would be removed from the dialogue completely. The decision to call these interactions ‘interviews’ as opposed to ‘conversations’ was a deliberate one and was made to further ensure that even the quietest members of the focus group might have a relatively uninterrupted opportunity to offer their ideas and opinions. Aware that some preliminary scaffolding of the interviews would be necessary, I provided a Peer Interview Guide (see Appendix G) and the researcher and participants discussed which questions would be most useful to ask.

Here again, the co-constructive approach was employed:

AM: Do you want to have a look over the questions just really quickly in case there’s anything you might want to say. Or that you might all decide is a good other question?

R: Well you could, I certainly would like you to use the first three. I think that would be a good starting point... Are there any there, apart from those first three that you think are particularly important to investigate?

P: I think the earliest memories one is quite good, cause that’s kind of like when it first impacted on you.

P: Like that would have a lot to do with why we read now, I think.

R: Okay. Shall we add that to our core questions?

P: The one that I see as quite cool is why would you read a book when you can see a movie of the story instead?

R: Right, okay, so there’s a couple you might just like to add in.
Freedom to ask additional questions from the Interview Guide, and beyond it, was also emphasised however:

R: But your questions and comments are paramount, okay, so if you come up with a question go for it.

The participants were then divided into pairs, were provided with digital cassette players and each pair moved to a different part of the library. Participant pairs were given five minutes to prepare for the interviews and then five minutes each as interviewer/interviewee. There were therefore six interviews conducted.

In addition to the three strategies detailed above I employed two research tools to gather data. These were the Reader Profile and the Reading Log.

**Reader Profile:** Because I wished to gain broad insights into the backgrounds of the participants I adopted a similar research tool as Sulentic-Dowell, Beal and Capraro (2006) who used a “... personal reading profile to examine idiosyncratic differences in reading propensity and its factors.” (p.235). Previously Chapman and Turnner (1999) and Henk and Melnick (1995) had used questionnaires to explore reader self-perceptions but I wanted to move beyond their investigations, which seemed to investigate mainly ‘functional’ aspects of reading. Sulentic-Dowell et al. (2006) provided an 11 item questionnaire including largely narrow questions whereas my nine item questionnaire, while containing some specific, closed questions, was designed primarily to evoke as wide a range of response as possible. Therefore, at the first group interview meeting on June 17 2008, participants were asked to fill in this Reader Profile (see Appendix E). The participants were assured of the confidentiality of these. The profiles began by asking for the name and age of the participants and then posed a number of open-ended questions each of which was supported by some suggestions as to the sorts of aspects the participants may wish to comment on. The questions were constructed in a manner that would give the researcher some general initial information pertaining to the participants in relation to the intent of the research. Therefore questions ranged from the specific, quantitative type such as; ‘How much time do you think you spend reading outside of school hours?’ and ‘What type of reading do you mostly do outside of school hours?’ to more qualitative questions such as; ‘How would you describe yourself as a reader?’ and ‘Do you think reading is important and why?’.
**Reading Log:** While this research sits squarely in the realm of qualitative research I employed some quantitative research methods in order to get a fuller picture of the reading lives of the participants and the wider context within which those reading lives were lived.

The justification for this can be seen in Crotty's (1998) assertion that:

*We may consider ourselves utterly devoted to qualitative research methods. Yet, when we think about how investigations carried out in the normal course of our daily lives, how often measuring and counting turn out to be essential to our purposes. The ability to measure and count is a precious human achievement and it behoves us not to be dismissive of it. We should accept that, whatever research we engage in, it is possible for either qualitative methods or quantitative methods, or both, to serve our purposes. Our research can be qualitative or quantitative or both qualitative or quantitative, without this being in any way problematic (p.15).*

The intent of the Reading Log was to gather quantitative data about how much and what type of reading teenagers do outside of school. At the first group interview meeting participants were issued with a prepared reading log template. This was discussed and participants did a ‘trial log’ together to consolidate their understanding of how the log should be filled in. Subsequently, between the first and second group meetings, the participants filled in the log for 14 days between June 18 and July 1, 2008. At the second group interview meeting I shared my analysis of the logs that had been submitted. Participants expressed some reservations and confusion about the initial log. For instance:

P: Sorry just one comment about the log, it was a wee bit confusing that, you know how like we were trying to, at the bottom, how we were filling out like the rest of the things that happened in our day...

P: There were things that almost didn’t fit in any category so I just kind of...

It was therefore decided by the participants that I should modify the log and they would fill the altered log in for a further period of 14 days. I consequently modified the log, sought email feedback on the changes and presented the second log at focus group meeting three. The revised log was completed between August 27 and September 10, 2008.

Like Alverman, Young, Green and Wisenbaker, (1999), I opted for daily reporting because research on the accuracy of self reporting has shown that regular reporting works best. I felt that busy teenagers would be more likely to fill in a ‘user friendly’ log, daily and over a relatively short two week period, and that data gathered thus would be more reliable and valid than that from a few, spread out snapshots. This view is endorsed by DeLongis, Hemphill and Leheman (1992).
Data Analysis

Because this project was firmly located within the qualitative research paradigm and relied on mixed-method methodology, it was important to focus on the primacy of description and quotation which are the essential ingredients of qualitative research (Quinn-Patton, 1990). I consequently sought to adopt a system of inductive analysis where as Quinn-Patton reminds us “... patterns, themes and categories come from the data, they emerge out of the data ...” (p.390). While in theory this project was co-constructed and the direction of the interview group discussions was dictated by the participants it has to be acknowledged that the development of initial research questions and the occasional use of an interview guide meant that, in practice, data generated fell within certain parameters imposed by those constraining factors.

Data in this project was therefore analysed in several ways. The analysis of the qualitative data involved a generative (or inductive) process of thoroughly viewing and reviewing the transcripts of the group interviews to find patterns and significant themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, Knoester, 2009). Within this process I used “cross-case analysis”, “... grouping together answers from different people to common questions” and later “... analysing different perspectives on certain issues” (Quinn-Patton, p.376).

The quantitative data, namely the Reading Logs, was analysed in table form in search of average daily minutes spent on various reading and non-reading activities.

Ethical considerations

A full application to the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee for ethical approval of a research or teaching proposal involving human participants was submitted to the committee on March 10, 2008 and approved later that month. Although the project did not specifically identify the collection of data on Maori participants the research proposal was also forwarded to the Ngai Tahu Research Consultation Committee and approved at their March 11, 2008 meeting.
In this section of the report I identify and comment on a number of ethical considerations inherent in my research project. These were:

**Confidentiality.** I outlined the confidentiality safeguards to be observed during the selection of the sample, in the documentation issued to, and signed by, participants (see Appendix A) and again at the first focus group meeting. The importance of confidentiality was re-iterated throughout the project. For instance in the fourth group interview meeting just prior to the peer interviews I alerted the participants to the use of audio recorders. A participant then asked whether I would be using the peer interview tapes. My response was:

Yep, I'll be taking the information off the tapes and using it anonymously. I mean it might be helpful if you mention, if you introduce each other on the tape, you know like this is CNN reporting, this X (participants actual name) from the library at (name of school) interviewing whatever. Um, but I wouldn’t but I wouldn’t use your names in the final write up of the research because that comes under the confidentiality part.

As stated in the Ethics proposal, all original data will be archived at the University of Otago College of Education for five years. At the end of the project any specific identifying personal information, and audio recordings, will be destroyed.

The requisite **Conditions for Storage** of material are in place and will be observed.

**Co-construction.** The participants were made aware of the purpose of the project and the process that the research would follow, at the first group interview meeting. In addition it was made clear that this project was independent of the school from which the sample had been drawn. My intent was that the project should be co-constructed and this was made clear to the participants throughout meetings. For example in the second group interview meeting I began by reminding the group of this intent:

...ok, because if you remember we talked about it last time that really I'm co-constructing it with you, alright, rather than sort of coming along and 'do' research 'on' you, like you know, ask a whole lot of questions, take away the data and then forget about you totally, I want to just talk to you, and see where it takes us ok, so wherever it takes us that’s good.

However, despite being genuinely committed to, and explicitly espousing, a co-constructivist approach I was aware of the problem inherent in this situation. While wanting to empower the participants, and thus to evoke rich data from them, I was aware of the need to support and scaffold their contributions so that they felt secure and so that I gained sufficient qualitative
data to address my research questions. So for instance, having made the statement reported above, I then added; “I’ve got some, some ideas that I think I’d like to explore, but after that we can just, we can go for it”. This tension was also evident in the fact that while seeking a free-flowing dialogue I had an interview guide with me at each meeting and referred to it often. Even in the peer interviews, questions to ask were distributed on a photocopied interview guide and, in the event, the participants sought some surety and consistency from me as to which of these questions they should ask each other. Therefore, while every effort was made to co-construct the research project it might be ethically naive to assert that this was completely so.

**Point of entry.** Having determined that the sample for the project would be made up of senior teenagers of both sexes I needed to consider what was the most pragmatic way of securing an appropriate sample. Since I have extensive networks throughout secondary schools in the region where the research took place I decided to use a school as the point of entry to sample selection. The most obvious school to choose was a large co-educational school where my partner worked and where I had links to senior students, having coached the senior debating team for two years. The Principal of the school was approached informally and then by formal letter (see Appendix C) to gain access to the school. Access was granted freely and without conditions.

**Sample selection.** Selection of the research sample proved to be more problematic than anticipated. As previously outlined in the Method section the process began when I spoke to a meeting of most of the year 13 students at the school and, after a disappointing response, ended in when I spoke to a specific English class with the support of their teacher who was the Head of English at the school and well known to me in a professional context. I was slightly alarmed that both the Principal of the school and the Head of the English department suggested that they should approach students to take part so that there was a significant sample. Their supportive enthusiasm was declined on the basis that this might be seen as coercion.

**Setting.** The safety of the participants was of paramount importance when determining where the group interview meetings should be held. In order to manage any risk inherent in participants travelling to meetings, particularly in winter months, it was decided to hold the meetings at the school, and immediately after the end of the school day, on days negotiated
with the participants. These decisions raised a possible ethical tension in that the research project was clearly and deliberately not concerned with reading in school and sought to engage the participants in a co-constructed, broad and relatively unconstrained polylogue and yet the meetings were held at school and the participants were dressed in school uniform. This tension is addressed more fully in the Findings section of this report.

**Communication between the researcher and participants.** Initially the school’s communication system (daily notices) was used to ensure that participants were informed of the time and place of the first focus group meeting. At that meeting participants were asked if they were comfortable giving me their e-mail addresses and cell – phone numbers and they readily agreed to do this. One of the participants did not have, or chose not to share, an e-mail address. Much of the subsequent necessary communications about meeting times, for instance, took place by e-mail. These e-mails were largely couched in semi-formal language and sent simultaneously to the whole focus group including the Assistant Moderator. However, I also used text messaging to alert participants to the e-mails I had sent, to encourage participation, to remind participants of deadlines and also to attempt to communicate with the one participant who would not, or could not, access e-mail. For example:

- Hi. I sent you an e-mail today. Check it out. X are you good to go for July 29? Look forward to very cool session with you then. Text/e-mail back. (Researcher)
- Hi fellow txt maniacs. Looking forward to our meeting tomorrow 3 15 in the library. Be there for stimulating stuff, funky food and bountiful booty. Maybe. (Researcher)
- Hey everyone. This is your research nerd calling. How is the Reading Log going? Reckon this is day 9? Kind regards from darkest (name of town). (Researcher)
- Hi X. Sorry you missed the session today. Great discussion and very tacky food! Can you please pick up the Reading Log envelope from the school office? Instructions on envelope. Really would like your input. Hope all is ok. (Researcher)

The use of text messaging raised some ethical considerations pertaining to the processes and protocols used when working with teenage research participants. While I attempted to send texts simultaneously to all focus group members, inevitably some individual responses were personal, informal and/or only loosely related to the intent of the original text. For example:

- When you get reading logs mine will be a tad crazy. I've been off school with a nasty tummy bug so have been reading heaps. Just thought I'd warn you! (Participant)
- Yo, its going great. And I'd love to have another meeting. (Participant).
I was keenly aware of the potential for text conversations to drift, almost imperceptibly, from generalised, light-hearted interchanges to ones that might conceivably be interpreted as more intimate. This consideration prompted me to be cautious in the language that I used in text conversations, to avoid responding to some texts and in a number of cases to forward individual texts to the Assistant Moderator to ensure the transparency of the communications.

**Clarifying and checking data.** Participants were assured of the opportunity to view and clarify these data both in the Ethics proposal submitted at the outset of the project and during meetings subsequently. Honouring this undertaking proved to be a minor challenge. I did share my initial analysis of the first Reading Log with the participants soon after the Log had been submitted and, in developing the second, improved Reading Log I sought e-mail feedback on the amended format. However, sharing and checking other findings took much longer. In the case of the transcripts of meetings, it took until February 2009 until all of these were available in a form that was suitable for sharing and by this time some members of the focus groups had left school or had changed contact details. However, I did make every effort to circulate the transcripts for comment and intend to make the finished version of this report available to the participants.

**Use of Assistant Moderator.** As outlined and justified in the Method section of this report, the decision to use an Assistant Moderator in this research project had a number of benefits both logistically and in supporting a secure, positive environment at meetings. In addition the Assistant Moderator received all the commonly circulated text and e-mail communications between the participants and me and proved to be assiduous in saving these for future reference. The involvement of the Assistant Moderator was thus useful in further assuring the maintenance of ethical, transparent interactions and communications between the adult researcher and the teenage participants in the project.

**Food.** While possibly a minor consideration, the provision of food at the group interview meetings proved to have at least one impact worthy of consideration. I reasoned that the participants would be tired at the end of a full school day and would therefore need, or at least appreciate, some food and drink. This possibility was signalled in Section 12(f) of the Ethics Proposal. In providing this sustenance I took into account both the likely tastes of teenagers and the responsibility to re-enforce current messages promoted in schools about healthy eating. Nevertheless, while fruit was provided it has to be conceded that the food (jokingly
described by participants as “tacky”) most eagerly consumed at the meetings was sugar-laden. This, although in retrospect amusing, seemingly resulted, on at least one occasion during focus group meetings, in quite loud, divergent interactions that required me to redirect and facilitate the discussions. It may have been more responsible of me (in terms of process and with regard to healthy eating) to have provided less flamboyant food at the group interview meetings.

**Koha.** The Ethics Proposal submitted at the beginning of this project stated that no financial reward or other tangible inducement would be offered to the participants. This undertaking was carefully observed before and during the project. However as the project evolved (for instance the consensus decision to complete a second, revised Reading Log), because an additional group interview meeting was scheduled and given the diligent willingness of the participants to engage in the process, I increasingly felt that some form of koha would be appropriate. Having confirmed with the Associate Dean (Research) at the University of Otago that this was indeed ethically possible it was agreed that each participant would receive a fifty dollar book voucher at the end of the fourth group interview meeting.
CHAPTER FIVE
Findings

In this Findings chapter, the presentation of data is structured according to the data collection strategies and tools employed during the project and the data is reported without analysis or extensive comment. In keeping with my intent to give primacy to the participant voices and the consequent data generated by the interactions in the group interviews, I have included both 'mini-profiles' of the participants and significant passages of their unedited dialogue. As noted at the start of the previous chapter I have used 'P' for participant, and numbered them one (1) to six (6) to identify the participants except where the transcribed tape was indistinct. In such cases I have merely reverted to the use of 'P' to indicate participant. I have identified Assistant Moderator as 'AM' and myself as 'R'.

The next chapter, Chapter Six, contains analysis and discussion which explains the data presented and is organised within the confines of the research questions posed at the outset of the research while allowing for the inclusion of generative analysis.

I have chosen this method of presenting my findings because, as Quinn-Patton (1990) states; "Description must be carefully separated from interpretation" (p.375) and because I believe that ultimately, the accumulation of "... thick description ..." (Denzin, 1989) leads to a more complete picture of the habits, attitudes and beliefs around personal reading that the participants have.

Data Presentation

The Participants

In order provide some context for what follows and to give some insight into the perspectives of the participants I have decided to write 'mini-profiles' of them. The information included here is based on the Reader Profiles that the participants filled out at the beginning of the project and on my own, more subjective, knowledge and observations of them.
P1: An 18 year old female, P1 was an outgoing Year 13 student. P1 was an enthusiastic participant in the project and her bubbly sense of humour provided some lighter moments during the group interviews. She seemed to place a lot of importance on friendship and community, had a part-time job and often talked about co-curricular involvement and church life. P1 has since commenced training as a primary teacher.

P2: An 18 year old female in Year 13, P2 was a strongly individualistic person. Obviously a capable student, she held definite views and expressed these confidently. P2 was quite willing to engage in dialogue with the group and not averse to some humorous jibes at the researcher! P2 had a part-time job and she has since gone on to University, flatting with other participants.

P3: The sole male in the sample, P3 (perhaps understandably) spoke less frequently than his more outgoing peers. Aged 17 and in Year 13 P3 gave the impression that he had a group of close friends but was perhaps not extensively involved in school life. While missing one of the group interview meetings P3’s contribution was useful as he had a slightly ‘cynical’, very pragmatic view of life and the place of reading in it. I have lost track of P3 since the project.

P4: The sole Year 12 student, a 17 year old female, P4 seemed at times (naturally) to be somewhat in awe of the situation and slightly daunted by the confidence of some of the other participants. P4 listened thoughtfully and contributed sincerely, modestly and yet with good insight, to the discussions. She was most at ease during the peer interviews. I believe that P4 would have completed secondary school in 2009.

P5: An impressive young woman, P5 was 17 at the time of the project. Head Girl of the school and academically very able, she was clearly respected by the others. A good debator and clearly immersed in English and the social sciences, P5’s contributions were articulate and mature yet she showed empathy with, and respect for, the contributions of others. P5, somewhat surprisingly considering her workload at school, had a part-time job. I believe she is now in her second year of an arts and law degree.

P6: A voracious reader, P6 was also a strong oral communicator, keen to express her opinion but open to the views of others. Her self-confidence allowed her to express emotions
comfortably and to reflect with insight on, for example, the effect books had had on her. Now in her second year at university P6 continues friendships with several of the other participants.

The Group Interview Meetings

As mentioned in the Method section of this report, four group interview meetings were held in 2008.

The meetings varied in format due to the inclusion of the interactive activities (strategies) also described in the Method section. However, the primary focus of these meetings was the discussion that emanated from the interactions between the researcher (and, to a small degree, the assistant moderator) and the participants.

The results of these discussions are reported here chronologically and mainly clustered according to the questions that evoked them. The exception to this is where questions asked earlier are revisited or expanded upon at a later time, in which case these responses are included, as appropriate, to produce findings that are more thematically cogent.

In attempting to establish the idea of eo-construction early in the research process I began by asking the participants:

R: Ok, so if you were me and embarking on this project and you wanted to find out about teenage reading what would you want to know?

Pause

R: What do you think you would want to find out?

The participants initially responded that they would be interested in time spent on reading, barriers to reading, what attracts readers to a book, the reasons why we choose certain books, memorable books and texts we have read, reading on the internet, early reading experiences and stereotypical views of readers. They added:

P2: Maybe you could find out what people actually do – like whether they think they should be doing something else...

R: Yes. The guilt factor...
P: If I was you like... finding out what reading means to different people – whether it's a relaxing thing, or whether they think they should... if it's an information thing like newspapers or magazines.

**The importance of reading.**

Finding that the suggestions as to what might be interesting or pertinent to ask were drying up I then posed the question; is reading important? This generated animated response, quoted in full here:

P: Yes! Yes!

P4: If you want to have a happy life and a good career then YES!

P3: For life's basic skills, comprehension, spelling and structure when you're writing...

P2: Teaches you about life’s experiences

P: Allows you to be creative – lets you think outside the box – gives you things to write about

P: Reading lets you do lots of different things .. do you know what I mean?

The group came back to this topic late in Group Interview meeting two. Their additional thoughts are sampled below:

P5: ... but Dad used to read to me heaps and heaps and like I've always enjoyed English and I've never had a problem like writing essays or anything else..., but I find that writing is so much easier because I have read, and it's just like a good outlet, like something to rely on if you need to relax ..

P4: Um, I think it's quite good cause it gives you a bit of, um, time out of the real world I suppose you'd say and by the time you've read you have a different view sometimes...

P6: Like I think it can't be harmful in any way really. I mean you've still got to be learning, your brain's still going to be functioning... I think, so yeah I think that it's really, really beneficial. I totally agree.

P1: I think it's brilliant. I think it gives you an imagination

P6: You feel like you've accomplished something.

P2: You feel like your brain has been made better, you know?

R: Does it make you feel a better person?

P3: Depends what you're reading I think.

R: That's true,

(General laughter)
After a discussion about the Reading Logs (see below) the conversation in group interview meeting two turned to magazines. I asked what types of magazines participants typically read. An initial response was "... glossy ones" but more specifically titles such as New Idea, The Listener, OK, Cosmopolitan, Readers Digest, Skywatch and Time Magazine were mentioned. Two participants contributed untitled specialist dance and movie magazines while one ventured the fact that her work at a supermarket allowed her access to ‘That’s Life’, ‘Real Life Reads’ and ‘Secret Story’. I was the target of some humour when I admitted to occasionally picking up a magazine:

P5: Woman’s Day? (Group laughter)
R: No, no, no. Not Woman’s Day...
P6: Men’s Health?

Attempting to redirect the conversation to more neutral territory I asked:

R: What is it all about though when we, we admit that we read these magazines, we admit they’re trashy, but we still do it?

The responses were rapid and varied. Opinions expressed were that; they’re interesting, gossip and over-rated celebrity scandal, a good way to relax, real life reads about criminals and serial killers and stuff! Additionally, however, participants observed:

P6: ... and I think it’s like partially that you know it’s crap in the back of your mind, you know that it’s ...
P2: Yeah, you know that it’s like some lie ...
P6: Some writer is just writing up a whole lot of ...

One participant went further and suggested that celebrity gossip in magazines was a ‘strategy’ to affirm the sanity or normality of the reader. Another thought it might be a mechanism by which readers were encouraged to “... get a similar look”.

The fifth question asked was: When you read newspapers, what do you go to? The initial responses were unequivocal; cartoons, sports, television pages but the subsequent discussion also revealed that two of the group members read the editorials and one regularly read most of the paper including the court news.
A major part of the second group interview meeting was taken up with discussion around the question of what it is that attracts one to a book and how one chooses what books to read. Participants agreed that they often read according to genre or author. A typical response was:

P3: Um, yeah, genre. If I read a book by an author I like, that’s like a good thriller, I’ll go onto other thriller books and then I might read a good history and I’ll go on and read other history books.

Recommendations from others were discussed and use of the blurb was alluded to. One participant mentioned that she looked for books that are; "... like critically acclaimed, like they’ve like won the Montana or the Booker Prize or something and like classic books..."

Faced with some good natured teasing she continued:

P5: And I’m doing um, scholarship English and one of the essays we can use like any text we’ve ever read. So I’m going back and I’m reading like ‘To Kill a Mocking Bird’ and like all the classics at the moment. But like I look for books that are based on real events or real people as well like Phillipa Gregory’s ones, even though you know, they’re grossly inaccurate about like Henry the 8th...

The issue of whether participants read the last page of a book in order to find out whether it was worth pursuing caused sharp division and some consternation:

P3: Sometimes I’ll read the first page and then the last page and then I’m like awww what’s in the middle?

P6: I never read the last page

P5: Oh my goodness!

R: Well he wants to know what he’s getting I guess and...

P5: It’s like a sin!

P3: Well you wanna know if it’s going to be a happy ending, sad ending, and then it makes everything as you read it makes way more sense as well because you know it’s already happened.

P6: No, you can’t spoil the ending, it’s like the ultimate sacrifice.

P4: Would you not read a book if it’s a sad ending?

P3: Oh yeah, I would, but it just gets you prepared for it.

P4: No!

P5: It’s like fast-forwarding to the end of the movie.

I also pursued the issue that had arisen in the discussion of magazines which was that the participants seemed to critically evaluate what they were reading but seemingly that
evaluation did not necessarily impact on whether they continued to read that particular material.

R: ... Um, it’s interesting because you talk on two levels about books. You talk about what you like, but you also talk about what you recognize as being crap, for want of a better word, but it doesn’t stop you reading.

P3: But it’s like eating though, you know you’re hungry even though it’s like real bad food, you still eat it.

P5: It’s like watching a trashy soap.

P2: I like often read like books that are in my bookshelf over and over again just because when I’m bored, I read them.

*Engagement.*

A question that participants pursued further in the later Peer Interviews was raised thus:

R: You’ve been attracted to a book for whatever reason and you start reading it, what is the thing that makes you keep going once you’ve started it?

Initially the responses focussed on whether, once a book was started, it had to be finished. The participants were quite evenly divided on this matter. Typically:

P2: If it doesn’t like grip me at the start then I can’t read it.

P5: I have to finish it.

P2: I can’t I can’t read it. Like Mum gave me this book that she said “oh, it’s really good once you get into it.” I read like a chapter and I was like, nah. Like, I can’t, it’s too boring.

P5: (Referring to a book she had struggled with) I finished it last week and it’s taken me like I swear two months, but I just had to finish it, like I just can’t, I’m not the person to leave it you know. It would like haunt me.

Two participants agreed on a more patient stance:

P4: Not every book is gonna grab you in the first chapter

P6: True, they say it takes about 50 pages like to get into it and you should give a book 50 pages.

R: And that’s why, I guess, in some ways, if you’ve only got 10 minutes to read it’s very difficult to get into a book and you tend to stop and not like it.

P6: You’ve sort of gotta have faith that the book’s really gonna really grip you later on...

Later the discussion turned to the factors that engaged and then maintained the reader’s interest in a book. One participant needed something to make her “... stop and think ...” in the
first chapter of a book while another said that it was the writer’s style that sustained her interest. Several responses alluded to the idea that a good book draws you in to its world and in to the thoughts of the characters that inhabit that world:

P2: And I like books that I get so involved in that I just, like I’m there, you know like Harry Potter and I kind of like books that are from someone’s, like what people are thinking like Adrian Mole and like Catcher in the Rye.

And on a variation of that response:

P3: Like there’s got to be twists and stuff, like you don’t like something that you can just see everything coming. Or whodunits, like whodunits are quite cool - like you read 200 pages and try to work out who did it and then find out you are wrong, so you read another 200 pages.

The act of reading.

I then posed a more abstract question:

R: ... what happens when you read? I mean... where do you go? Cause you think about it, it’s a weird experience.

This produced a wide-ranging discussion. Here are some vignettes from this section of the second Group Interview meeting:

P6: Do you sort of find that sometimes, um, this is gonna sound quite funny but like sort of feel that like you’re in a bubble, so that like you’ve gone to the world wherever the book is set and ...

P3: You just float along watching.

And later:

P2: That’s what I kinda think, apart from there’s some books that are like fantasy, where I feel like I actually am the character. But other times like, um, if the books are like kind of real life then I feel like I’m just there. It’s weird.

P6: It totally makes me think in a different way ...

P2: Yeah ...

P4: It almost teaches you some of life’s experiences without you actually going through them.

The participants also identified positive feelings emanating from the reading they do:

P5: It feels like, um, such a more academic thing to do than just like watch TV or go on the computer ...

P2: Yeah, yeah. You feel smarter after it.
P5: Like I feel guilty if I watch four hours of TV, but if I read for four hours, like, oh well you know, its gonna be good in the long run.

R: Oh, so you feel self-righteous!

P5: Yeah (laughing).

At the beginning of Group Interview meeting three I shared a pertinent extract from Proust and the Squid by Maryanne Wolf (2008) that built upon these responses. (See the section of this report on co-construction). The participants responded thus:

R: Does that describe where you go, what happens?

P6: Yeah

P5: That’s pretty bang on

P1: Definitely.

Censorship.

Having participated in the Cline activity and explained some of the choices they had made during that activity, the participants were then faced with some questions around censorship:

R: Are there things that you shouldn’t be allowed to read, we shouldn’t be allowed to read I should actually say?

The responses were wide-ranging.

P5: I think, yeah, even if it’s something harmful I think reading it, in a way you can get a clearer perspective ... I’ve just been thinking like the Al Qaeda websites, if you went and read their websites, if you went and read their viewpoint and what they believe ... it’s still a valid opinion.

P6: I think that’s actually been like a pretty debatable topic, eh? I read a random thing on a book called ‘Lady Chatterley’s Lover’ or something. And that was like a hugely debated thing about whether it should be banned. I think because of the content, and that, I really don’t know the details, yeah but like its interesting because in the end they decided not to ban it...

P5: Banning a book would just cause hysteria anyway...

R: Is there anything that you would not read? If you picked up a book and there was a clear blurb on it, is there anything you wouldn’t read?

P1: Violence. If it was going to be really violent or ...

P4: Something to do with violence. Torture. I can’t stand things like that.

P2: The only thing that doesn’t, or makes me not want to read it is if it’s boring. If it looked interesting then I’d read it ...

R: Why on the other hand do people burn books?
Page versus screen.

At this stage of the third group interview meeting I attempted to introduce a proposition that had been emerging both in my own reading and in reviewing the reading logs of the participants. This intervention was in keeping with my realisation, reported in the Method section of this report, that the participants were interested in hearing and discussing new ideas rather than, more passively, merely acting as sources of information for me.

R: ... but, um, I've been thinking where you sit in terms of reading. 'Cause you're like a transition generation between people you read, you read both traditional text and digital stuff off the internet and things like that quite a lot, whereas fifty years beforehand, i.e. people like me who are ancient (laughter), would be traditional readers of text and read very little off the screen. Um, and if we look forward there may be a generation, in a few generations time that might be predominantly, digital. But you span, according to your reading logs anyway, you span those two, um, literacies. So here's a question: What are the differences or similarities between reading traditional text and reading off a screen?

The participants agreed that it is easier to read from a book than from a screen, that the physical act of reading was more comforting and 'situated' when done in the traditional manner. Further, they considered that reading from a screen was inferior because: "... you don't get a picture in your head and you don't like go to a place or anything." And, in addition, the participants maintained that with digital reading you are more likely to scan and skim whereas with a book you "... tend to absorb it more." They were, however, prepared to consider a future where readers would indulge more often in hyper-fiction (for example).

R: The research shows us, or tells us, that when you read a traditional text that it's an interactive thing. The text gives to you and you bring stuff to the text. More than that,
reading is what we call ‘generative’. In other words, when you read something it generates other thoughts in your mind and expands your thought. Yeah?

The participants built upon this thought. They identified with the notion that readers make connections between the book and associated real-life experiences or issues. They also showed interest in the idea that reading is, as I (rather clumsily) put to them, "...part of developing the brain and developing the thinking process.” The following, and admittedly speculative, question put to the participants was:

R: If the internet (meaning digital reading) doesn’t do that because it is not generative, because all the visual stuff’s just there, should we be frightened of the internet?

The participants seemed uncertain about this idea and the discussion reverted to the comfort and convenience of books. While acknowledging that computers were useful tools for word-processing and for research, for instance, they seemed unwilling to conceive of digital reading overwhelming traditional reading. Ultimately this part of the conversation finished with general agreement that:

P4: “I think people will have more sense than just to wipe out books and handwriting and stuff.”

There was also a broader confidence that:

P2: I don’t think we should be concerned that, you know, that the human race is going to go down because we’ve got computers.

P6: We’re going to be the old people still reading books. (Group laugh).

The third Group Interview meeting then moved into an activity, One and All, the findings from which are recorded below.

The fourth Group Interview meeting began with Peer Group Interviews, the findings from which are also recorded in a discrete section later in this report.

Reading at school
Following these interviews the discussion focussed relatively briefly (since this aspect of reading was not a focus of the research) on personal and voluntary reading opportunities that the participants had had at school.
Participants mentioned such activities as school-wide sustained silent reading and reading logs, particularly in the junior years. Not all had enjoyed the compulsory nature of these activities, for instance:

P3: I hated the tutor time. I just thought it was so silly. You’d be at school and you’d just want to talk to your friends and just run around and be Form Two, but they’d try and make you sit down and read.

Several of the students however, shared a pleasurable memory of being read to, by a teacher:

P2: He’s in year 8. He sat down for a period a week and he would just read a book and like he’d just read to us. And I mean at the start it was like; ‘what the hell, why are you reading us a book kind of thing’ but afterwards everyone was like 'yeah' and we were like everyone in the class got into it hard out, eh, and it was so fun like.

Some participants reflected on the changes they had noticed as they progressed into the senior school:

P5: ... And I think now that it seems all the reading we do in school or asked to do at school all fits a purpose, like it’s all geared to exams or some kind of study. There’s no real emphasis on voluntary reading at all, and because we’re doing so much work in class and so much reading, you don’t really feel like the half hour you get for lunch time, you’re more likely just to sit and chat rather than do more reading, even though that’s a genuine way to relax.

Other participants agreed that their ‘down time’ at school was most likely to be spent socialising with friends.

Reading Profile

The initial sample consisted of six young people, five females and one male. Four of the participants were 17 years old and two 18. Their Reader Profiles (see Appendix E) revealed them to be a homogenous group in several regards. Five of the six participants described themselves as “enthusiastic” readers with the sixth characterising herself as a “... good reader” who would be better if she had more time to read.

When describing why they read, five of the participants specifically stated that it was “relaxing”. Other responses included: “... because it takes me away from life’s problems”, “Reading just makes me think”, “... and because it is like being in another place” and “I read
because books open so much more interpretation and imagination than other forms of entertainment”.

The participant’s backgrounds as readers revealed further unsurprising commonalities. Most said that they had been read to as children (“Dad used to read me novels before bed”) and one participant noted that she had been taught to read before she went to school. Five Reader Profiles commented that they had a lot of reading material at home and the majority of the respondents noted that they received books as presents from parents, relatives and, in one case, generous neighbours.

Active use of the library was less prevalent although one Reader Profile revealed that “... in my family we try to go to the library as a family once a month”, another recorded the fact that “I’ve had a library card since I can remember” and one respondent noted that her stepmother is a librarian so access to books is “... extremely easy”. In one case a participant revealed that they didn’t use the library but this was because “I have a tendency to misplace books and rack up fines!”

The type of reading done by the participants was predictably eclectic and time was a major influencing factor in most cases. All of the focus group members indicated that they read either magazines or newspapers or both, while three responses mentioned digital reading such as Bebo, MSN and e mail. While five of the participants mentioned reading fictional and non-fictional books, most of the responses were qualified by references to reading “in bed” (presumably at the end of the day), or during the holidays. One participant noted “I tend to read quick things as I don’t have much time.” Half of the Reader Profiles made mention of the extra reading that needed to be done for school.

The Research participants were also asked to make a preliminary estimate as to how many minutes per day they spent reading outside of school and how many minutes per day they spent on the Internet beyond school hours. While the estimates made were very approximate ones they provided a useful contrast/comparison to the actual time spent as recorded later in the participant’s Reader’s Logs. The participants guessed that they spent on average 78 minutes each day on reading outside of school and approximately 70 minutes each day on the Internet, outside of school. It should be noted here that the interface between reading done for,
or as a consequence of, school and reading done for pleasure was blurred both in the way the Profile was set up and in the resultant responses.

When asked what general purposes they used the Internet for the research participants listed the following: information for school (6), shopping, news, keeping in touch with friends (4), internet banking, personal enjoyment and games.

All of the research participants considered reading to be important and for a range of reasons.

“I think reading is really important for those who want to live a happy, long life. Reading gets the academic career you may want, you learn about everyday life and its enjoyment ...”

“... because it helps you be creative. Reading gives you ideas and you learn things you otherwise wouldn’t have. It is also a place to read about someone else’s life and dramas, get a different perspective.”

“Yes, because it’s relaxing, it works the brain without feeling like your (sic) working, it helps you learn and understand new things and it lets you be in another place for a while.”

“I believe it is important in many ways. It deepens knowledge and English skills, it also relaxes and allows you to escape.”

“Yes extremely. I have always enjoyed learning and done well academically and I credit a great deal of this success to the way I was encouraged to read by my parents from an early age. Self confidence and enjoyment also come from regular reading.”

“Because it offers you a chance to look at things from a different perspective and all stories have hidden messages.”

The Reader Profile also gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on the place of reading in their lives by asking them how important reading is in comparison to the other things they do. Four of the readers profiled considered reading to be somewhere in the middle of their list of priorities. Comments such as “Reading has probably lost importance in my life in the past few years as I have gotten busier and resorted to TV...” and “Reading generally is less important than sports, TV and leisure time ...” and “Reading is not as important as the internet because on the net I keep in contact with friends ...” illustrated the relative importance placed on reading. Yet two respondents commented that it depended what “mood” they were in and both said they were more likely to read than do other things if they were tired. One went further and asserted “I can’t sleep as well if I haven’t read first though.” One participant in the research, when asked how important reading was compared with alternatives such as sport, TV, listening to music and being on the computer responded that it “All depends on the quality of the book.” while another observed “… it’s just as important as physical exercise.”
Findings

The final section of the Reader Profile encouraged the participants to answer the question, “Do you talk about the reading you do, with others? With whom?” One participant responded “Not really ...” but the other five indicated that they did talk about reading. Four of these young adults said that they spoke with their parents about what they read and all of them agreed that they shared information and recommendations regarding what they had read with friends, particularly friends with similar interests to themselves.

Reading Log

As noted previously in this report, the design of, and instructions around, the initial Reading Log caused the participants some concern. As a result they agree to fill in a second, revised, Reading Log (see Appendix D). The findings reported here are taken from the second log which was filled in by five of the six participants over 14 days in August and September 2008.

The results reported here are in average minutes per participant, per category.

(a) All daily reading. This included both traditional and digital reading done at home and at school. This reading may have been voluntary or done for school at home. The types of reading included in this result were; fiction, non-fiction, magazine, newspaper, articles, internet research, internet surfing, social interaction (e mails, chat rooms) and games. The average reading minutes per day, per participant was 141 minutes.

(b) All voluntary traditional reading. This category was restricted to traditional texts such as fiction and non-fiction, magazines and newspapers and participants recorded on average 66 minutes of this type of reading per day.

(c) All digital reading. In this category participants averaged 29 minutes per day on digitally-based reading activities such as social interaction and on-line games.

(d) All reading for school. This category included reading, traditional and digital, done at school and at home for school. Participants recorded a daily average of 41 minutes.

Four out of the five participants also recorded other typical activities that might have had some impact on the amount of reading they could do. The three main categories in this part of the reading log were: television watching (an average of 96 minutes per day), homework (an average of 46 minutes per day) and sports and cultural activities (an average of 46 minutes a
day also). It should be noted that the homework average theoretically included the amount of time doing traditional and digital reading for school.

**Clines**

Five of the six participants participated in the cline activity. The results here are confined to reporting the three genres identified most frequently in each part of the activity. The participants who completed the clines showed that they perceived newspapers (4), classics (3) and historical novels (3) the most ‘worthy’ genres. Least worthy, in their view, were magazines (5), crime (3), fantasy (2) and science fiction (2). When asked to rate the genres in terms of personal enjoyment, participants rated newspapers (4), crime (4) and biography/autobiography (2) as their favourites. Least enjoyed genres were science fiction (4), plays (2) and historical novels (2).

**Perceptions of a reader activity (One and All).**

Five of the six participants participated in this activity. They worked in two groups (A and B) thereby producing two posters.

The two participants in group A agreed that the key words, in their consensual view of a reader, should be: empathetic, imaginative, creative, ambitious, intelligent. They considered, but discarded, such words as: sociable, witty, well-rounded, nerdy, quiet, know it all, hard worker, focussed thinker.

Group B’s poster recorded that group’s consensus as to how readers are perceived as: intelligent, well-educated, enjoying the quiet side of life, having glasses, “nerdy” (by society), reading = great general knowledge. Through the process of discussion they necessarily had to discard a number of peripheral, mutually exclusive (and perhaps provocative) views including: from a wealthy background, not confident, not blonde, not up with the fashion, linguistic, good at speaking, goody good, no social life, naive, follows rules.

During this activity the researcher left the cassette recorder running and, while the general buzz of group work made much of the dialogue difficult to transcribe accurately, the humour and perceptiveness of the student voice provided some worthwhile insights. Some of these interactions are recorded here in their raw form:
Findings

P6: One that’s more reserved, sort of intelligent person but that sort of reads to escape and one that’s more willing to share their knowledge...

And:

AM: I said that was really interesting that idea of bookishness and the solitary person who reads and has their life through reading. It’s very Jane Austen...

P6: I know of someone like that... and she happens to be a librarian...

P: Books are her friends...

And again:

P: Nerdy we’ve got.

P: Well rounded, I think

After a good humoured but nevertheless potentially cutting personal remark, this interchange took place:

R: No put downs!

P6: Exactly

P2: It’s a compliment.

P6: No way. Readers know how to handle crap from other people.

R: Reading builds resilience do you think?

P6: I do actually.

Later, during a brief report back on their posters, the group had a more specific discussion about the term ‘nerdy’ which finished with this contribution:

P5: And, like, as in just one final point. I think often the whole nerdy thing comes from, um, people that are kind of jealous. And the people that don’t have, because I think readers often have... sort of a quiet confidence, you know?

Having explained their posters the participants responded to a question from the Assistant Moderator:

AM: Do you become intelligent because you’re a reader, or do you read because you’re intelligent?

P4: I think both

P5: I think you become...

P1: Become intelligent...
Findings

P5: Yeah well not intelligent as they, you know, they get, I don’t know, straight excellence and merits, it’s more like a general knowledge, knowledgeable, and yeah, just better, like writing and reading skills.

Peer Interviews

As noted in the Method section, participants were divided into pairs for this fifteen minute activity and the six interviews centred around five common questions. The first three of these had been suggested by the researcher and the other two were suggested as worthy of discussion by the focus group immediately prior to the activity. Three further questions were included, by different interviewers, of their own volition.

The first common question posed in the interviews was, “Who do you talk to about books?” and supplementary to that, “Do these conversations bring you closer to others?” Most of the responses mentioned parents and friends as being those to whom participants talked about books. There was evidence that such conversations were part of the wider relationship between the teenagers and their parents.

P: Um, well a recent series that I’ve really gotten into is a book that my dad actually recommended me, and so he often asks me which book I’m up to and what’s happening, so I find that does actually bring us closer together, as it’s just one of those things we can talk about.

P: I usually talk to my Mum and friends about them, and yeah they bring me closer because we’ve got the same interest in books and find like common interests, and you can talk about them with other people and see how they made them feel.

P: Um dad, and that’s about it really. He always tells me if he’s got a good book he wants me to read ...

Friends were mentioned in three of the responses. For instance:

P: Um, if I read a really interesting book and I know like my friends are also into that author, I’ll probably you know talk about the one I’ve just read or which one I think is the best, or you know ...

One participant responded more generally.

P: Um, certain friends I talk to about books, or my mum and yeah, I don’t know, it’s kinda it just depends what I’m reading. Like if I’m reading something to do with just say history then I might mention it to my teacher, but yeah mainly just certain close friends.
Secondly, interviewers asked: “Can you recall a book that changed your life or altered your thinking?” Here the findings were, naturally, very personal and speak for themselves. Some books had a direct impact on the reader:

P: (interviewee). Yes, um, “My Sister’s Keeper” by Jodi Picoult because that book is all about having a genetically modified child.

P: (interviewer). So, ah, how did that change your life?

P: (interviewee): Because, um, because I have a brother with Cystic Fibrosis and I have the gene too, so in the future, um, genetically, changes might need to be made to children of mine genetically so that they don’t inherit the gene or they don’t have Cystic Fibrosis. So this book was quite amazing reading from a point of view of someone’s life who has been genetically changed.

Another participant responded:

P: Um a couple of years ago I was given a book called “Chinese Cinderella” by Adeline Yen Mah and it’s about a girl who is basically rejected by her family because her mother died after her birth and that, and she’s got a rather horrible stepmother, and um, it just sort of hit me at the time because I’ve got a split up family and it’s not nearly as bad as her situation, but yeah, it did actually, I just remember it really impacted me. I even cried because it was, you know, quite a moving story, and yeah, it just made me think, you know, it sort of broke me away from thinking that every book ended happily ever after. I think it was the first ‘real’ book that I ever read. So yeah I’d say that’s one of the biggest books that’s impacted on me.

A third participant began with the general observation that: “I think all books alter your thinking in some way.” and then went on to say:

P: But one that really stands out was one I actually got from the (school name) library when I was about year 9, year 10. And I think I just picked it up because I was doing a reading log at the time, but it was called “Noughts and Crosses” and I can’t even I can’t remember the gist of it. It was mainly about a black girl and a white boy, but instead of um, as usually set in America, the black people weren’t the inferior race, they were like the upper wealthy class, and it was the white people who, you know, had to deal with racism. So it had a really fresh take, and it really kinda not got me interested but opened my eyes to, you know the damages of racism and everything.

The third question, suggested by the researcher, was: “When you say that a book is really good, what you mean by that?” There were a variety of responses centred around four common ideas; engagement, challenge, cogency and visual imagery.

The idea of ‘involvement’ or ‘engagement’ appeared several times:

P: Um, I mean that a book stops and makes me think, or it captivates me and can take me to another place
And:

P: That it captivated me the whole time and that like I was interested in it... and that I couldn't put it down

P: Um well generally one that interests me, so it'd have to be kind of action packed and with a lot of things going on in it, so I don't get bored...

A further idea that emerged was that, for four of the readers, there needed to be an element of intellectual challenge or stimulus inherent in the book.

P: Like if it has questions that challenge my thinking or challenge my logic, then I think that is a good book

P: So I like books that are entertaining but also quite intelligent and make you think.

P: Um, it's probably a book that's really, um, struck me, or really changed my thinking in a dramatic way... and I usually find that books that I find really good are often the ones that are really hard to get started ....

P: ... and um, that there's something in it, there's an extra message ...

Cogency also appeared as a quality that books required in order to be deemed 'good books'.

P: You know I really love a book that can draw all the ideas together but make you guess at each step.

P: ... and it's like, the plot's well thought out and it makes sense, and there's no little inconsistencies...

Finally the ability to create visual images in the reader's mind appealed to two respondents:

P: ... but yeah, I suppose easy to visualise, not too much detail...

P: ... and I can see the image in my head...

The members of the wider group suggested the fourth question; "What are your earliest memories of reading?" Five of the six interviews contained memories of parents reading to the participants. A montage of these memories illustrates the special nature of them:

"... dad used to come into my room and read stories or tell us stories and he'd always have a different voice for every different character." "...well when I was a little kid, dad used to read me books before I went to sleep. So he'd read me things like The Hobbit and the CS Lewis Narnia books. And I remember that I loved that. I used to fall asleep ..." "Both of my parents read to me from a really young age" "I can just remember Mum and Dad reading to us when we were lying in bed and then we'd fall asleep."
Findings

Three interviewers followed up this question with one about what stories interviewees could recall from their childhood. Texts mentioned included; Winnie the Pooh, The Famous Five, Baby Sitter’s Club, Saddle Pony Club, George and the Marvellous Medicine, The BFG, Rodney Rat, The Yellow Digger, Winnie the Witch.

The final question that appeared in all the interview transcripts was; “Why would you read a book when you can see a movie of the story instead?” Three responses alluded to the greater detail able to be gained from reading the book, and the amount of material left out of some movie versions. Two interviewees explained that the movie versions often destroyed the images the reader had constructed in their own minds. One participant encapsulated these two ideas in this way:

P: Um, probably because a book will have more detail so that you can get into it more and create your own visual image .... when you see a movie it gives you the image itself so you don’t have as much room to be imaginative and come up with what you think the setting and the people and all that ...

Three interviewers asked the additional question; “Have you ever been given a hard time for reading as much as you do?” In two cases the responses were brief and in the negative. The third response however (which was from the only male participant in the research) was more ambivalent:

P: (Interviewee) Not really. Like just mates giving you shit and stuff, but never, never anything like “you read, you’re gay.”

P: (Interviewer). But I suppose you wouldn’t read it in school like

P: (Interviewee) No

P: (Interviewer): It’d just be at home in your spare time.

P: (Interviewee) Yeah.

Four interviewers asked variations of the question; “Will digital reading ever replace traditional reading?” Three went further asking; “Would you have rules about digital reading?”

Three of the interviewees felt that digital reading would not replace traditional reading. The reasons given indicated that these teenagers saw a distinct difference between reading ‘from’ a book and reading ‘off’ a screen. This had to do with the comfort, both physical and emotional, gained from reading a book:
P: It’s better to curl up in bed with a book than it is to sit at a computer... I don’t see the appeal as, you know, sitting in a nice chair on a sunny day reading a book you know that really helps you unwind.

And further:

P: (Interviewer) Have you ever read a book, like digital reading, have you ever read a book on the computer?

P: (Interviewee). I didn’t even know that you could do that. Nah, I’ve never done it. It wouldn’t be the same cos you can’t like curl up in bed with a computer or lie down or...

One respondent however, was prepared to consider the possibility:

P: Um, I think it may, considering schools, particularly my sister’s school, she goes to (school’s name), and they’re trying to get everyone to get a laptop instead of working in their books, so yes, but I don’t think I’d like it.

Two of the participants felt that, if they were cast in the role of a parent, they would try to restrict the amount of time their children spent on the computer and would encourage traditional reading.

As signalled at the beginning of this chapter, I have given primacy to the voices of the participants, allowing their insights to speak for themselves. Clearly these teenagers are committed readers and enthusiastic proponents of the act of reading and all of the benefits associated with that act.

In the next chapter of this report there is analysis and discussion of the data assembled here.
CHAPTER SIX
Analysis and Discussion

In analysing the data and discussing the results gained from the strategies and tools used in the data collection process (namely group interviews, reading profiles, reading logs, clines, perception of a reader activity and peer interviews) I have used an integrated approach. While data gathered from each of these discrete data sources has been reported above in the Findings chapter of this report, in a chronological or linear manner, the data is analysed and discussed here according to its relevance in answering the research questions posed. The advantage of treating data in this manner is that it ensures that I have revisited the data both in a linear and thematic manner or, as Turnbull would observe, I have had "... an iterative period of immersion in the data to allow the meaning and perspectives of the participants to become evident and speak from the data" (2002, p.326).

Throughout this project two types of reading (namely traditional and digital) have been referred to. The reason for delineating these activities in the literature review, the research design, the data collection and here in the analysis, was so that comparisons between the various reading endeavours of teenagers could be made with a view to better understanding the synergies between them and how each might impact upon the other. It should be acknowledged that while I have clearly delineated these types of reading I have deliberately (for reasons of conciseness) not interrogated the differences between the 'skim reading' which is often associated with reading from, for instance, a screen and the more methodical, deeper reading commonly supposed to take place in interactions with traditional printed text. This issue is however alluded to in the Literature Review chapter (p. 28).

A further matter to be noted here is that while the general research questions for this project emanated from my own desire to know more about teenage reading and from the literature around this issue, the element of co-construction inherent in the emergent design meant that the participants posed questions and provided information and insights that occasionally sat at the periphery of the original research questions. In these cases, rather than omit the findings as being irrelevant, I have included analysis of them within the parameters of the existing questions in the belief that the voices of the participants need to be heard as fully as possible.
**What and how much do teenagers read outside of school?**

This section of the report analyses what and how much traditional reading (that is reading of a non-digital type) senior teenagers do outside of school. The next section analyses the digital reading that teenagers do. The participants had several opportunities during the project to discuss what they read. Initially they recorded their reading preferences and habits in a Reader Profile and later spent time in focus group meeting two elaborating on some of these. In addition the Reading Logs that participants filled in provided data on how much reading they did and the Cline activity provided a glimpse into which genres the participants enjoyed most. There is no doubt that mature teenagers do read extensively, whether as Griswold et al. (2005) point out it be as an activity in itself or as a means to an end. In this regard, the teenagers in this study are no different from people all over the world. As we have seen, the literature suggests “...that the short answer to: ‘Who reads?’ is just about everyone” (Griswold et al., p.128). However it is obvious that the participants in this project were very keen readers who read every day to some degree. This compares with, for instance, teenagers in the NLT (2008) survey, of whom only 37.7% read every day or almost every day outside of school.

**What do teenagers read?**

The short answer to this question appears, from the results, to be mainly newspapers and magazines. All of the participants recorded (in their Reader Profiles) one or both of these genres as being important to them and newspapers were also clearly valued in the Cline activity. Newspapers were clearly important for both entertainment and information; cartoons and the television pages were first ports of call for most; the sports pages also attracted the teenage reader while two of the sample read editorials regularly. A range of magazines was mentioned also. The spectrum extended from Real Life Reads and New Idea to The Listener and Time magazine. These findings are reflected in other, bigger and more general studies. The CCSE project in the United Kingdom, for instance reported in 2006 that; “Newspaper reading was popular, with 76% of the sample choosing a preferred daily title” and again; “Similarly, 68% of the sample was able to identify a favourite magazine title” (Wright, p.127.). Two years later the NLT (2008) survey asked the question; “Which of the following do you read outside of school more than once a month?” 77% of respondents selected magazines and 43% newspapers.

There are three likely explanations for the popularity of newspapers and magazines amongst the sample; availability, currency and time. The availability of these reading materials was not
discussed in depth although one of the participants commented on the fact that she read magazines at work. It might be assumed that these participants, being engaged but busy young people, value knowing what is going on in their community and in the wider world and more, immediately, need to know what is on television that night! Time, however, was clearly the most pressing consideration. As noted previously, one participant wrote; “I tend to read quick things, as I don’t have much time.” The reading of fiction and non-fiction books seemed to be largely confined to the end of the day (“... in bed”) or during the holidays. The Cline activity revealed that the teenagers enjoyed biography and autobiography as well as crime novels. Science fiction was clearly the least enjoyed genre. Once again, the sample’s relatively limited engagement with books is a milder reflection of studies elsewhere, where, for instance; “93% of school students indicated that they had chosen to read material other than books in the course of the week” (Hopper, 2005, p.116).

How much do teenagers read outside of school?
In their Reader Profiles the participants estimated that they spent on average approximately 78 minutes each day on ‘traditional’ reading outside of school. Their later Reading Logs revealed that the actual time spent was slightly lower at an average of 66 minutes per day. It must be noted here that these times can only be seen as rough indicators since the reading done for school, at home, was not clearly delineated by these research tools. These findings show that the participants in this research project were atypical of teenagers internationally. For instance, in the United States the average time spent reading by the 15 to 24 age group was, in 2006, seven minutes per week day and ten minutes in the weekends or holidays. Additionally, the US Department of Education reported that the percentage of 17 year old Americans who read for fun almost every day was, as measured in 2004, only 22%, down from 31% in 1984. Of the high school seniors (a group directly comparable to my sample) surveyed in 2004, 21% read nothing at all and a further 26% read less than an hour a week (NEA, 2007).

What and how much ‘other’ reading do teenagers do?
This section focuses on the digital, or ‘other’, ‘non-traditional’, reading that senior teenagers do outside of school.

What digital reading do teenagers do beyond school?
Predictably much of this reading was around social networking media such as Bebo, MSN and e mail. However other uses such as shopping and internet banking were mentioned. One
participant (the only male in the sample) spent significant ‘chunks’ of time, although only occasionally, on games.

In their Reader Profiles the participants estimated that they spent about 70 minutes per day on the Internet. In actuality, when filling out their Reading Logs over a period of fourteen days, the participants averaged only 29 minutes per day on digital reading outside of school. These facts contrast sharply with those in a study, Growing up Digital, published by Tapscott in 2009, which found that on average children and teenagers between the ages of 8 and 18 spend six hours a day connected to some digital communication device, often to several simultaneously.

Before proceeding to the third section on beliefs and attitudes it is important to acknowledge and discuss two further pieces of data that span both research questions one and two. As recorded previously, having been dissatisfied with the first Reading Log they filled in, the participants agreed to fill in a second Reading Log. This log produced general data, recorded in the Data presentation section, about all daily reading (the average reading per day, per participant was 141 minutes) and within that blanket figure, all reading for school per day, (41 minutes).

These data are significant. They show that these senior teenagers, despite having busy lives, manage to read voluntarily, whether it be traditional or digital text, for approximately (on average) one hour and forty minutes per day.

As my research proceeded, an interesting and significant theme that emerged was the idea that the teenagers involved in the project comfortably utilised both literacies, saw little conflict in that duality and did not anticipate the eventual demise of traditional reading in the face of technological developments. This finding accords with the views and data reported by Griswold et al. (2005) pertaining particularly to internet use. They write:

... unlike the case of television, the internet does not seem to be displacing reading. A poll in 2001 shows that internet users spent exactly the same amount of time reading as people who never used computers at all (NEA 2004, p14). A review of the available research suggests that the relationship between reading and going online is not zero-sum but more-more... it appears that the heaviest internet users are also the heaviest readers (p.137).
This idea is revisited in the section below dealing with participants' attitudes and beliefs about reading.

**What attitudes and belief do teenagers have about reading?**

In this sub-section of the data analysis I have ordered the ideas that emerged from the data to progress from the initial personal memories and insights revealed by the participants through to the more generalised attitudes and beliefs they espoused regarding the nature of reading and issues related to it.

**Personal Insights.**

*Children are made readers in the laps of their parents. (Emilie Buchwald)*

During this research project I was privileged to gain a number of personal insights into the family backgrounds and activities of the participants. They also shared memories of their early reading. They talked about where they get reading recommendations from, who they talk to about what they read and the place of school-based reading in their development as readers. Of great interest to me was the relative place and importance of reading in their busy teenage lives. This section is an exposition of these various personal insights.

**Memories:** The backgrounds of the participants were characterised by parents who read to them (often at bedtime), homes where reading material was plentiful and where books were given as presents. Several of the participants mentioned using the library; one provided the delightful image of her family going to the library together once a month. This material, gained from the Reading Profiles, was augmented by data gained from the Peer Interviews. These memories are reported as a montage on page 75 of this report, along with a list of fondly remembered books. These personal insights and memories add up to, in my mind, a poignant reaffirmation of the power of story-telling and its centrality in the emotional and academic growth of apparently well-balanced young people. Additionally these results mirror the unequivocal research literature about the positive impact parental involvement and the home environment has on literacy specifically and education in general (Jeynes, 2007, cited in Clark et al., 2008).

**Talking about reading:** During the Peer Interviews participants availed themselves of the opportunity to discuss who they talked to about the reading they did. The fact that most of the participants got recommendations for reading material and spoke most often about reading to
their parents was surprising but encouraging too, in that these discussions seemed to be positive indicators of the wider relationships between the teenagers and their parents. Of course, friends were mentioned too; "... like my friends that are also into that author" or "... yeah, mainly just certain close friends". Here we have echoes of the notion of reading as socio-cultural practice (Griswold et al., 2005) previously outlined in the Literature Review chapter (p. 18).

**School:** The participants were divided in their appreciation and enjoyment of reading that they had done at school. Interestingly, the most positive comments pertained to being read to at school by teachers. The participants were more dismissive of sustained silent reading seeing it, at worst as a "silly" attempt to force reading on energetic youngsters and, at best, as a futile intrusion into teenagers' social time. It was obvious however that there is now little time in the school day for reading for pleasure.

**Reading lives and other lives:** When I first asked the question; How important is reading? the response was spontaneous, unanimous and insistently affirmative. In retrospect I probably took this (perhaps subconsciously and certainly naively) to mean that not only was the concept and practice of reading universally important but that reading was personally important to the participants and that, consequently, their lives were filled with reading, that reading was at the centre of their daily existences. Comments from their Reader Profiles, reported fully in the Data presentation section above, gave me a more realistic understanding of the relative place of reading in these teenagers' lives. The participants revealed that as they had become busier, discretionary leisure time was more likely to be spent watching television or keeping in contact with friends on the internet. The Reading Log provided quantitative data that allowed me to triangulate this particular information and provided other insights into the relationship between the reading lives of teenagers and their hectic overall lives.

For instance, while the participants did not all watch television every day they still averaged 96 minutes per day and spent an average of 46 minutes per day on sporting and cultural activities too. The place and influence of television, while covered extensively in major surveys in the USA (National Endowment for Arts) and the UK (National Literacy Trust) was not a focus of this study. Nevertheless it is interesting to note that American teenagers between the ages of 15 and 24 years averaged, in 2006, 117 minutes on weekdays and 153
minutes on weekends and holidays, watching television. Proportionally, the same group spent 41.9% of their total leisure time watching television and 2.6% of that available time reading.

Three of the participants had after school jobs. The busiest of these young people (incidentally, the Head Girl of her school and the only Scholarship candidate in the group) typically worked up to four hours a day, three days a week. When homework is added (a relatively manageable three quarters of an hour per day, including prescribed reading) a picture of a very busy teenager emerges. This picture is consistent with that drawn in the international literature available. The demand for educational achievement is but one of the factors pressurising mature teenagers. As Richardson and Eccles (2007) observed, in a study that also used student interviews to gather data:

In the senior years of high school, the pressures can become so intense for educational achievement that everything else in a student's life is swamped— including non-assigned leisure reading. One interviewee, Jane, a high reader registered her distress at trying to juggle the competing demands on her time and energy during her final high school year when she was barely able to keep up with the assigned work (p.345).

While the participants in my study did not appear to be ‘distressed’ in this regard it is certainly not surprising, given their lifestyles, that relatively speaking, reading was increasingly assuming a less pre-eminent place in their lives. An associated conundrum for teenagers everywhere would appear to be that, apart from struggling to find time to read, teenagers across various countries also struggle to find time to ‘be teenagers’ to ‘hang out’ and to socialise. This, incidentally, may well be a reason why some school-wide reading programmes in New Zealand are strongly resisted by teenagers who see them as an infringement on their social time.

Why teenagers read.

The teenagers who were part of this research project were very clear that reading was a good thing to do. Their general reasons for this are outlined below. To a degree these reasons also answer the more immediate question of why teenagers read; to escape, to be informed and entertained. In addition, of course, these teenagers have to read for school.

A more abstract idea that surfaced briefly was that of the way reading made the participants feel. This aspect of reading, the affective domain, appears more specifically in studies like the NLT (2008) survey where 68.2% of respondents said reading made them feel “calm”, 38.8%
“happy” and 33.7% “bored”. While not stated explicitly there was, throughout our project a sense that the participants felt some sort of self-confidence as a result of being readers. Similarly, the idea of ‘possible selves’ was not explicitly raised during discussions. Perhaps this facet of reading was inherent in the participants’ sense of “escape”. The participants in my study seemed to feel less guilty about reading than they did about watching television or playing on the computer: “... it feels like a more academic thing to do”, “... you feel smarter for it”, “... it’s gonna be good in the long run”. There was, evidently, a certain self-righteousness associated with reading.

The nature of reading and readers

The literature about reading provides a huge array of material around the general issues of what reading actually is and who readers are. The participants in this project were clear in their opinions on both matters. The further issue of what the act of reading entails is dealt with separately below.

Williams (2008) points to the very basic endeavour of decoding words and recognising letters as only part of what a reader does. Barton (2001) found that although the people he studied did not necessarily identify themselves as readers they possessed “… multiple and varied vernacular literacies” that they used every day and yet they; “… often categorised reading as an activity they regarded as more focussed, literary, and part of high culture, not daily life” (Barton, 2001, cited in Williams, 2008 p.1). The participants in this research project were asked to conceptualise reading broadly and in terms of how readers were perceived in the One and All Activity. This approach, while less of a blunt measurement than that used by Clarke, Osbourne and Akerman in 2008, evoked similar responses. The NLT survey asked (p18); “If you imagine someone who reads, what kind of person are they?” and the responses were; clever/intelligent 57.9%, someone who will do well in life 54.4%, happy 45.9% and geeky/a nerd 34.6%.” The posters produced by the participants in my study touched on similar traits (as reported in the data presentation section above) and yet the characteristics discussed were more wider-ranging and, ultimately, those written down were limited by the fact that the recorded words had to be consensual.

The importance of reading

*All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been: it is all lying in magic preservation in the pages of books.* (Thomas Carlyle)
The overwhelming response to this question when it was first posed in the initial focus group meeting was, "Yes!" The reasons given and presented above, were all encompassing and so diverse as to defy neat clustering by theme. There were repeated references to escapism and to relaxation as outcomes of reading and to the power of reading to take you to other places, to entertain, to inform and to present other perspectives. A comment in a Reader Profile belied the image of many teenagers as passive absorbers of entertainment; "I read because books open so much more interpretation and imagination than other forms of entertainment." This generally positive response was probably unsurprising since, in their Reading Profiles, five of the six participants described themselves as "enthusiastic" readers. The participants themselves seemed to be evidence of the comment:

I have always enjoyed learning and done well academically and I credit a great deal of this success to the way I was encouraged to read by my parents from an early age. Self-confidence and enjoyment also come from regular reading.

The discussions recorded in the Data Presentation section of this report about the benefits of reading, and, to some degree, the self-confidence being a reader engendered in these particular participants, suggest that Rosenblatt's (2005) vision for reading can indeed be manifest:

*One aspiration is that students develop a critically appreciative eye to access their own as well as other cultures, and that they learn to discriminate between those elements that nourish a sense of a person's dignity and worth and those that do not* (Connell, 2008, p.115).

The difference between the quite vehemently stated importance of reading in relation to overall success in academic life and indeed, wider life, and the relatively lower importance that the participants actually placed on reading for leisure in their current lives was surely largely indicative of the busy lives they led. This dichotomy of attitude (or tension) is reflected, in reverse, in the NLT’s broader research in 2008:

*While only a small percentage of young people saw reading as more important than TV, sport, computers, hanging out with friends and listening to music, these perceptions changed dramatically when they were asked to consider the impact of reading to help them do well in life. In this case nearly half of them believed reading is more important than TV* (p.7).

A more specific (and even more personal) element of this general enthusiasm for reading emerged during the Peer Interviews. The participants were asked: "Can you recall a book that changed your life or altered your thinking?" The responses of three participants are reported verbatim on page 75 of this report and give an insight into the connections that teenage
readers make between fictional worlds and their own and what a powerful agent for personal growth expansive reading can be.

_The act of reading_

_I believe that reading; in its original essence (is) that fruitful miracle of a communication in the midst of solitude._ (Marcel Proust)

During this project the group explored various aspects of the act of reading. We discussed what attracts one to a book, how one chooses what to read, what elements of a book engage and retain the reader’s attention. By implication the answers to this last question provided an insight into what the participants thought constituted a ‘good’ book. More abstractly we mused on the question of what happens to one when one reads, where one goes. And, in a slightly less serious, perhaps anti-climactic vein, the participants debated whether it was “sinful” to read the end of a book prematurely and whether once a book had been started the reader had a moral obligation to finish it!

Participants agreed that they often ‘got on a roll’ and read a string of books according to the author or genre they enjoyed initially. Some browsed blurbs and others went with the recommendations they received, often from parents. Only one of the responses alluded to critical acclaim or reviews as influencing her choice. This partially reflects Hopper’s (2005) findings that the main influences on book choice are, in order of importance; prior knowledge of book or author, the appearance of the book, recommendations, links to television or film, genre.

A book must engage the reader by making them “stop and think” early on and that the books that draw one into their world are most successful. This would explain the popularity of Harry Potter, a series that was mentioned several times during the project. A further element that received attention was that of “twists and stuff” and the importance of intrigue in sustaining teenage interest was borne out during the Cline activity where the participants nominated crime novels as their favourite fictional genre. One response summed it up this way; “... like whodunits are quite cool, like you read 200 pages and try to work out who did it and then you find you are wrong, so you read another 200 pages.”
Perhaps the most intriguing question in this study was the one which asked the participants where they went when they read or, put another way, what happens when you read? Not surprisingly both participants and researcher struggled to articulate an exact answer but one participant ventured that “... you totally sink in your sub-conscious” while another described it like being in a “bubble”. The notion of being an observer in another place, and of other’s lives, emerged and was perhaps best expressed: “Yeah or like you’re sort of part of it but you don’t alter anything that is going on around (you), you’ve just this fantastic view of everything that’s happening”.

The idea of a book being all absorbing was also discussed:

P2: If I’ve like a real good book I’ll think about it like all day, I’d like be like, oh, I just want to read.

P1: If I’m reading a good book it goes everywhere with me and everywhere I’m always thinking of the book or, you know, if I was in that person’s position ...

The responses here, particularly those touching on the idea of the sub-conscious and the “bubble”, are important because they are contemporary echoes of a long fascination with the mystery of reading. Brian Stock encapsulates that history of fascination:

It was Augustine, the first experimenter in the psychology of reading, who drew attention to the fleeting, ephemeral nature of consciousness in the reading process. After him, Petrarch and Montaigne illustrated the ways in which the reader’s awareness halts the relentless flow of images through the mind in order to create a timeless relic from their destruction, which we call meaning. Later Proust and Freud were aware that memory reassociates those initial impressions with experiences in a interior, emotional, and symbolic chain of events (2008, p.399).

After the discussion in focus group meeting two, I reflected on the responses and at the start of focus group meeting three checked that I had understood the intent of the participants’ answers by reading this extract from Proust and the Squid (2008), alluded to on page 65, that describes what happens when one reads:

While reading we can leave our own consciousness and pass over into the consciousness of another person, another age, another culture. “Passing over” a term used by the theologian John Dunne, describes the process through which reading enables us to try on, identify with, and ultimately enter for a brief time the wholly different perspective of another person’s consciousness. When we pass over into how a knight thinks, how a slave feels, how a heroine behaves, and how an evildoer can regret or deny wrongdoing, we never come back quite the same; sometimes we’re inspired, sometimes saddened, but we are always enriched.
Analysis and Discussion

Through this exposure we learn both the commonality and the uniqueness of our own thoughts – that we are individuals, but not alone (pp.7-8).

After a brief silence, I asked the group; ‘Does that describe where you go, what happens?’

The responses were:

P6: Yeah

P5: That’s pretty bang on.

P1: Definitely.

**Will books last?**

It seems that this particular group of teenagers was unconcerned about the future of the book. Whether this was because they naturally assumed that the book and other technologies would continue to exist side by side, complementing each other, or that they simply could not conceive of a world without books as artefacts, was not an issue we addressed. Certainly my own reading around this issue indicates that the advent of digital books, already underway, will inevitably lead to a shift in the way readers ‘consume’ books. The current, at times polarised, debate encapsulated below, will, judging by the attitudes expressed by the participants in this project, simply dissipate.

One can reconcile the evidence that Internet use (for example) does not depress reading with the evidence that reading is declining overall. Perhaps an elite segment of the general population – highly educated, affluent, metropolitan – has produced both heavy readers and early adopters of the Internet (Griswold et al, 2005, p.138).

At one extreme, there are the promoters of the latest whizz-bang technology, celebrations of online life and predictions of enhanced teaching and learning when the latest technology appears. At the other, there are nostalgic paeans to the book and book culture, diatribes against computers, video games and the internet, and expressions of moral panic over the dangers lurking for children in cyberspace (Snyder, 2008, p.13).
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The stories we tell from our research will reflect the paradigm from which we conducted our research. The researcher should remain visible and self-declared during the process of telling the story so that the reader understands when the researcher’s own voice is represented and when she or he is putting forward the voices of others (Turnbull, 2002, p. 329).

This chapter of the report begins with a section that will provide some concluding remarks on the relationship between the participants and the researcher. A second section will discuss the limitations of the project and, by implication, suggest some future research directions. This chapter will also include a third section referring to the main themes that have run through the Literature Review and the wider report; namely the changing nature of reading and the wider impact of the evolution of reading toward a form which integrates traditional and digital reading more seamlessly. These thematic references or motifs will be consolidated under the heading The Cuspal Generation? This report ends with a discrete sub-section containing some concluding comments.

Participant/Researcher relationships

The issue of the relationship between the researcher and participants was one that pre-occupied me throughout the project. When submitting my research proposal I stated that I would “... position myself in the research as a keen reader while seeking to maintain the stance of a genuine learner”. This stance seemed sensible because as Glesne (2006) observes “Casting yourself as learner correspondingly casts the respondent as teacher. For many this is a flattering role that enhances the respondent’s satisfaction with being interviewed. And when you are a learner you get taught” (p. 94). Initially then, I believed that my role was to be a naive learner, an observer, a facilitator, a moderator or all of these to varying degrees. Certainly, in adopting a constructivist paradigm and an emergent, co-constructed research design I also was inherently interested in the concept of ‘the student as expert’. Indeed reading Jeffrey D. Wilhelm’s You Gotta BE the Book (1997) confirmed my determination to hear the student voice as clearly as possible. As Michael W. Smith writes in the forward of
that book: "Wilhelm's research provides dramatic testimony that we too often undervalue the contributions students can make to our understanding of reading literature" (cited in Wilhelm, p xii). As mentioned in the body of this report I had to rethink this relationship after the first group interview meeting when it became clear that some of the participants at least were interested in what I already knew or thought about reading and were thus interested in my input. In retrospect other issues around the participant/researcher relationship seem worthy of consideration. The fact, for instance, that I am a teacher and teacher educator and at times clearly acted as such and, in addition, employed interactive teaching strategies during meetings, may have altered the relationship and the consequent responses generated at group interview meetings. As noted in the Ethical Considerations section of this report the fact that my partner is on the Senior Administration team of the school the sample came from and that I had previously acted as a debating coach at the school could conceivably have inhibited or skewed the responses of the participants. Add to these considerations the fact that the group interview meetings were held in the school library, immediately after school and that the participants were in school uniform and one must again question what complex dynamic these combined factors bought to the relationship between the researcher and participants. One response to such considerations is to note again the intelligence, maturity and openness of the data collected, generated through a range of research tools that the sample provided and the humour and mutual support evident in the group interview meeting transcripts. In addition the participants were certainly not beyond having a gentle joke at my expense. This was evident, for instance, in group interview meeting two when the discussion turned to the magazines read by the group. "Woman's Day", 'Sports Illustrated' and 'Men's Health' were all suggested as being suitable for me to read and one participant ventured somewhat mischievously that 'Men's Health' was "really funny .. like how to please your woman..." On balance it would seem patronising to imply that the participants were, in some way, responding in accordance with some subtle institutionalised expectations of how they should act or were, to some degree, attempting to 'please' the researcher.

A tangential but perhaps illuminating observation regarding the participants is pertinent here.

As noted, the participants were keen to participate in the meetings, seemingly comfortable with the researcher and with the presence of an assistant moderator and open in their responses. The one apparent exception to this openness and willingness to explore issues in depth occurred in group interview meeting three when the issue of 'censorship' was raised by
the researcher. It became clear that this was an area that the participants were not entirely at ease with and did not wish to pursue in depth. Rather than being overtly obstructive or refusing to reply they used humour to derail the discussion. This incident generates two possible and related hypotheses. The first relates to the background of the sample and the setting in which the group interview meetings took place. The participants may have been reluctant to engage, even peripherally, in a conversation that could potentially have moved to the subjects of sex and violence or even pornography because of their Catholic background or because they may have instinctively felt that such comments might have reflected upon their school. Secondly however, this incident was reassuring to the researcher in that it seemed to illustrate that the participants were prepared to assert (albeit gently) their unwillingness to be led into areas of discomfort and felt able to ‘turn the tables’ on the researcher without fear of disapprobation. The balance of ‘power’ in the research dynamic was somehow affirmed here.

This incident aside the participants seemed to genuinely enjoy the meetings. The fact that all (including one participant who had missed the previous meeting and may have, conceivably, been lost to the overall process) were prepared to attend the fourth, initially unscheduled, meeting is testament to this.

As mentioned in the Methodology section of this report I adopted a ‘mixed - method’ approach to this project. Within this framework I used several interactive strategies to assist with data collection. Strategies like the Peer Interviews and the One and All activity drew on my own experience as a teacher and, I believe, helped to facilitate the research process more effectively. I think that there is scope for a greater use of such strategies within the field of qualitative research.

**Limitations**

While matters of process have been dealt with in the previous section, there is one aspect of my method that impinged negatively upon the depth of my project, namely the manner in which I recruited my sample. It may have been better to recruit in a less public manner. A more subtle approach to smaller groups of students, identified by teachers who knew them, may have allowed more prospective participants to join the project without embarrassment or fear of being perceived as being in some way ‘different’. A more subtle approach may have therefore allowed me to work with a bigger, more diverse sample and thus to cover a greater
range of topics or alternatively to cover the topics raised in greater depth, from more perspectives. A particular case in point was the fact that there was only one male in the sample. This fact was a constraint in that it rendered any in-depth comparisons of the habits, attitudes and beliefs of males and females pointless in all but a superficial, implied way. A less obvious constraint imposed by the size of my sample and the method I chose to employ, was that I was unable to explore the socio-economic context within which the participants were readers unlike the NLT (2008) survey which used an anonymous quantitative survey to ascertain the relationship between reading and socio-economic status.

There were a number of interesting issues that emerged in the literature that I might have pursued and that would warrant further investigation. The study carried out by Richardson and Eccles (2007), referred to in the Literature Review covered in detail both the aspect of 'escape' and that of 'possible selves'. My project would have benefitted from further discussion of the concept of 'escape' and it would have been interesting also to have mooted the idea of 'possible selves' with the participants in my sample. This concept of 'possible selves' seems to me to be an important factor in why teenagers might read voluntarily. And if, as Robert Chartier (cited in Dolatkhah, 2008) maintains; "... reading by definition, is rebellious and vagabond" and "... readers use infinite numbers of subterfuges to procure prohibited books, to read between the lines, and to subvert the lessons imposed on them." (p.221) then perhaps teenagers read partly as an act of rebellion and to assert their own individuality. Nevertheless as Knoester (2008) writes; "Questions of identity formation are complex and difficult to study." (p.682) so perhaps this area is best left to the psychologists.

On another tangent; I might have investigated the degree to which the participants multi-tasked while using digital literacies. The whole issue of what effect digital literacies, and the multi-tasking now associated with them, will ultimately have, seems to me to be a crucial aspect in the evolution of reading. While the intent of this project was never to delve deeply into the relationship between reading outside of school and that done within school, nor to investigate the impact of technology on participants learning, both aspects require further attention. As Snyder (2008) observed; "There is a gulf between the world of the literacy classroom and the world of our students who are immersed in media, internet and video games" (p.21).
Specifically, with regard to the matter of the relationship between reading done outside of school and that done within the school there is much work to be done. The views of Richardson and Eccles (2007) are useful here:

*Teachers and educators explicitly encourage children from early elementary grades to read both in school and to engage in voluntary reading during their free time outside of school. If they are to continue to encourage children and adolescents to read outside of school, then it is important to investigate whether such literacy activity has subsequent benefits. In particular, it is worth questioning whether the correlations found in earlier studies hold simply because so much of school reading is fiction reading or whether such voluntary reading out of school has broader benefits beyond school grades and test scores.*

Another aspect of personal reading done at school that would bear further interrogation, particularly in the New Zealand context, is the effectiveness of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) programmes. As stated early in this report I have been a proponent of such programmes in secondary schools, mainly as a mechanism to engage teenagers in reading as a gateway to raising student literacy levels. During this study I have been alerted to some ongoing issues around the efficacy of such programmes. Does SSR alienate as many 'readers' as it encourages? Is the time allocated to SSR 'productive time; perhaps it is too long for struggling readers and too short for keen ones? Is SSR, as one participant in this study maintained, an unwarranted intrusion on normal teenage socialisation and thus an unnecessary irritant?

On reflection then, my decision not to address more fully the interface between reading in school and reading done outside school may have been a naive one since such an interface is inevitable and the issue is one of import for many secondary teachers, particularly of subject English.

Finally, I must acknowledge as I did in the introduction to this report (p.6) that, along with much other research in this area, my research has the inherent limitation of becoming outdated even as it is being conducted and written up. Digital books are on the market, kindles and I pads are commercially available. Thus the deliberate delineation between traditional and digital reading that runs throughout this report has already been blurred. The reading world has moved on markedly, even since 2008.
The Cuspal Generation?

Obviously it would be unwise to make global statements about today’s teenage readers from a small sample of keen readers located in southern New Zealand. And yet it is intriguing to speculate on how the evolution of reading might unfold given our deeper understanding of some of the habits, attitudes and beliefs of these participants. If we accept that these teenagers may be atypical (in their love of reading and their balanced acceptance and use of both traditional and digital media) we do, however, need to also grant the possibility that there are many teenagers like them. It is within this minority group of readers that the short term future of the deeper, slower, more deliberate act of traditional ‘reading for pleasure’, resides. Whether, in a couple of generations, the increasing occurrence of digital reading will have overwhelmed traditional reading or whether voluntary reading (of either sort) will succumb to the weight of efferent reading is unpredictable. In the meantime it seems that this is a generation on the cusp of ongoing, perhaps accelerating changes in what, how and even why, we read.
Concluding Comments

Reading is an act of interiority, pure and simple. Its object is not the mere consumption of information ... Rather; reading is the occasion of the encounter with the self ... The book is the best thing human beings have done yet (James Carroll cited in Wolf, 2008, p.212).

In the clash between the conventions of the book and the protocols of the screen, the screen will prevail. On this screen, now visible to one billion people on earth, the technology of search will transform isolated books into the universal library of all human knowledge (Kevin Kelly cited in Wolf, 2008, p.212).

At the end of Group Interview meeting three an unexpected turn of events led the researcher to reflect both on what he had learnt until that point and, later, on the research process and consequent relationships (or should that be vice versa) that had evolved. As the group was packing up the question was asked:

P5: What, what’s the most interesting thing you’ve learnt so far, just out of curiosity; like I’m sure you’ve done a lot of research.

The participants seemed genuinely interested in hearing an answer and so the researcher ventured this somewhat rambling and inarticulate response.

R: Yeah, okay, the most important, from you people the thing that I’ve learnt most, that’s impressed me most, is just how natural you are about your love of reading. You’re not defensive about it; you’re not worried about it. You can see the benefits of it. It’s just something you do, and I just find that really neat. Yeah, um, but in terms of what I have learnt in my research, the thing that I think has blown me away is just the getting started reading that book (Proust and The Squid), and starting to talk about the link between reading and thought..... and that’s kind of thrown me off a wee bit in the sense that I’ve thought wow, I didn’t really know that and it’s made me think even more about the importance of reading.

The participants in this research project are members of a cuspal generation. All around them an intellectual war is raging between defenders of traditional reading and those who embrace digital literacies. Meanwhile these young adults, as they most definitely will be when they read this, intelligently embrace the best of what technology has to offer and the joy inherent in curling up with a book.
At the end of my 'official' interactions with the participants and as I finished the data collection phase of the project, I was left with two pressing feelings. The first of these was a feeling of being daunted by the responsibility of recording their thoughts and insights in a manner that would do justice to their intelligence and enthusiasm.

P6: Will we sort of get to see your final ... (thesis)
R: Absolutely I think, yes, in about 10 years time you'll (group laughing) no, no, you will, you will see that...

The second, related, feeling was one of hope. I had been privileged to work with engaged, constructive young people; teenagers who saw reading as a wonderful, integral part of life much as I have always done. And, even more important than this, they were clearly fine representatives of the cuspal generation.

Text: Hey john thank u very much for the generous book voucher! I had a great time at the meetings. Hope our info gives you some success. Take care (Participant).

"In the last analysis, Socrates lost the fight against the spread of literacy both because he could not yet see the full capacities of written language and because there was no turning back from these new forms of communication and knowledge. Socrates could no more prevent the spread of reading than we can prevent the adoption of increasingly sophisticated technologies. Our shared human quest for knowledge ensures that this is as it must be" (Wolf, 2008, p.78).

One of the things our grandchildren will find quaintest about us is that we distinguish the digital from the real, the virtual from the real. In the future that will become literally impossible. The distinction between cyberspace and that which isn't cyberspace is going to be unimaginable. (Gibson, 2007, cited in Snyder, 2008, p.13).
References


References


Quinn-Patton, M (1990), *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, Sage, London.


APPENDIX A

Information and consent form for participants

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain my research project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, your name will be placed in a draw and the final sample will be selected randomly. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and I thank you for considering my request anyway.

What is the aim of the Project?
This project is part of my Master of Arts thesis. I am attempting to find out what, and how much, teenagers read outside of school and what they think about reading. I also hope to find out what “digital” reading teenagers do (for example, how much time they spend on the Internet).

What type of participants do I need?
I would like to work with ten teenagers, five young women and five young men. The participants will be in a Year 13 class.

What will participants be asked to do?
If you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to:
• fill in a sheet which asks you to describe what sort of reader you are (A Reader Profile)
• keep a Reading Log for a period of two months (this will take you about 5 minutes a day)
• attend three focus group meetings of one hour each and an exit meeting of one hour. At these meetings you will be asked about your attitudes and beliefs about reading. No preparation will be required.

Please note that I intend to co-construct much of this project with you. This means that you will have plenty of opportunity to suggest what we should investigate and to participate in the research process itself.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the Project?
You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.
What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?
I want to find out how much reading you do, what sort of texts you read, whether you think reading is important and much, much more!

This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the conversation develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the focus group meetings, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage.

The results of the project may be published but you will not be identified personally and you will only appear in published forms and in any presentations given under a pseudonym. I will share the data with you as we go along and before I use the final version in any way.

The data collected will be securely stored. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and destroy data gathered by email. However, the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed.

What if participants have any questions?
If you have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

John Taylor (Researcher)
Department of Curriculum Development and Teaching
University telephone number: 479 4989

Or

Sharon Young (Research Supervisor)
Department of Curriculum Development and Teaching
University telephone number: 479 4976

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee

[Reference Number as allocated upon approval by the Ethics Committee]
[Date]
CONSENT FORM FOR
PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;

3. Personal identifying information [video-tapes / audio-tapes] will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed;

4. I understand that this project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the conversation develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that I may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage.

5. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago library but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

6. I understand that reasonable precautions have been taken to protect data transmitted by email but that the security of the information cannot be guaranteed.

I agree to take part in this project.

........................................................................................................

(Name and signature of participant) (Date)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee.
APPENDIX B
Information and consent form for parents/ caregivers

Personal reading: Beliefs, attitudes and habits
INFORMATION SHEET FOR
Parents

Dear Parent / Caregiver

I have had the opportunity to speak with your son/daughter about a research project that I would like them to be involved in. The project has been approved by the school and I am now asking for your consent to include your son/daughter in my project.
Please read this sheet.

What is the aim of the Project?
This project is part of my Master of Arts thesis. I am attempting to find out what, and how much, teenagers read outside of school and what they think about reading. I also hope to find out what “digital” reading teenagers do (for example, how much time they spend on the Internet).

What type of participants are being sought?
I would like to work with ten teenagers, five young women and five young men. The participants will be in a Year 13 class.

What will participants be asked to do?
Participants will be asked to:
• fill in a sheet which asks them to describe what sort of reader they are
• keep a Reading Log for a period of two months (this will take about 5 minutes a day)
• attend three focus group meetings of one hour each and an exit meeting of one hour. At these meetings participants will be asked about their attitudes and beliefs about reading. No preparation will be required.

Please note that I intend to co-construct much of this project with the young people I am working with. This means that they will have plenty of opportunity to suggest what we should investigate and to participate in the research process itself.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the Project?
The participants may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage.
What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?
I want to find out how much reading the participants do, what sort of texts they read and whether they think reading is important.

This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the conversation develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that participants feel hesitant or uncomfortable they are reminded of their right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that they may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage.

The results of the project may be published but participants will not be identified personally and will only appear in published forms and in any presentations given under a pseudonym. I will share the data with them as we go along and before I use the final version in any way.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and destroy data gathered by email. However, the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed.

What if participants have any questions?
If you have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

John Taylor (Researcher): Department of Curriculum Development and Teaching
University telephone number: 479 4989

Or

Sharon Young (Project supervisor): Department of Curriculum Development and Teaching
University telephone number: 479 4976

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee

[Reference Number as allocated upon approval by the Ethics Committee] [Date]
I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My child's participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. My child is free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;

3. Personal identifying information [video-tapes / audio-tapes] will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed;

4. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the conversation develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

5. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that participants feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of their right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that they may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage of any kind.

6. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago library but every attempt will be made to preserve anonymity.

7. I understand that reasonable precautions have been taken to protect data transmitted by email but that the security of the information cannot be guaranteed.

I agree to my child taking part in this project.

Name of child: .......................................................... ..........................................................

Name and signature of parent/caregiver: .......................................................... Date: .................

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee
APPENDIX C

Letter to Principal

Letterhead

The Principal
School xxxxxx
Xxxx Street
DUNEDIN

Dear X

I am writing to ask for your consent to approach students in your school about participating in a research project that I am undertaking as part of my Master’s of Art thesis.

With the approval of the school I wish to work with ten students from a Year 13 English class in order to find out more about the reading habits of teenagers and what they think about the reading they do. The research will also look at what other “reading” (such as Internet use) teenagers do. The purpose of this research is to inform my teaching of prospective English teachers and to be able to share insights into teenage reading with schools.

It is important to note that my research will look at the reading these young people do outside of school. Therefore, while I hope that the school will allow me to recruit the participants in school time and to hold meetings with them, after school, on the school premises, the school will not, in any way, be responsible for administering the research.

This project has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee and I would be very grateful if you would consider my request favourably. Should you have any questions at all please feel free to contact me or my supervisor, Mrs Sharon Young.

Yours faithfully,

John Taylor
479 4989
jf.taylor@otago.ac.nz

Sharon Young
4794976
sharon.young@otago.ac.nz
APPENDIX D

Reading Log Overview

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APPENDIX E

My Reader Profile

• Name

• Age:

• How would you describe yourself as a reader?
(For instance: would you describe yourself as an enthusiastic reader or someone who reads only when they have to? Would you say you are an excellent reader or an average one? Why do you read? How does reading make you feel?)


• What is your “background” as a reader?
(You might choose to comment on whether you remember being read to as a child, whether your parents/caregivers read, what reading material is available to you at home, whether you buy books or receive them as gifts, whether you use libraries regularly.)
• What type of reading do you mostly do outside of school hours?
   (Here you can include the reading that you have to do for school but also reading you choose to do.)

• How much time, each day, do you think you spend reading outside of school hours?
   (Calculate roughly the average number of minutes per day you spend reading.)

• If you have Internet access at home, how much time, each day, do you think you spend on the Internet outside of school hours?
   (Calculate roughly the average number of minutes per day you spend on the Internet)

• What purposes do you mainly use the Internet for?
   (Your answer will probably be quite general. You might mention things like having contact with friends, playing games, searching for information for school or for personal use.)
• Do you think reading is important? Why? (Here you might consider such things as academic achievement, personal growth, knowledge, enjoyment, escape from everyday life)

• How important is reading in comparison to the other things you do? (You might consider the importance of reading in comparison with other activities you do, like sport, watching TV, listening to music, using the computer for recreation.)

• Do you talk about the reading you do, with others? With whom? (For instance do you talk to friends or family about what you have read? Do you recommend or lend books to friends?)
APPENDIX F

Focus Group: “Cline Activity”

1. Place the following types of reading material on the Cline according to how “worthy” you perceive them to be. Words near the top will be the most worthy, those at the bottom the least worthy.
   - Poetry
   - Magazines
   - Science fiction
   - Plays
   - Newspapers
   - Classics
   - Crime
   - Historical novels
   - Fantasy
   - Biography/Autobiography
   - (Other)

2. Now number in priority order which type of reading you enjoy most. 1 will be your most preferred and 5 your least preferred.

Thank you
JT
APPENDIX G

Peer Interviews

Interview Guide!

➢ The purpose of this activity is to allow you to revisit topics related to reading that we have already touched upon and/or to explore areas of the topic that you are interested in.

➢ Take turns to interview each other! (Up to 5 minutes each as interviewer).

➢ Below are some possible questions but it would be great if you added/made up your own!

   • Who do you talk to about books? Do those conversations bring you closer to others? How? *
   • Can you recall a book that changed your life or altered your thinking? *
   • When you say that a book is ‘really good’ what do you mean? *
   • What are your earliest memories of reading?
   • What stories can you recall from your childhood?
   • Why would you read a book when you can see a movie of the story instead?
   • Have you ever been ‘given a hard time’ for reading as much as you do? How did you feel? How did you respond?
   • Will digital reading ever replace traditional reading? Why? Why not?
   • If you were a parent would you have rules around digital reading? What would they be?
   • Other: