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**Using realistic fiction to enhance social decision making in
middle grades students**

Jones, Jeanneine Petersen, Ed.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1992

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**USING REALISTIC FICTION TO ENHANCE
SOCIAL DECISION MAKING IN
MIDDLE GRADES STUDENTS**


by

Jeanneine Petersen Jones

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
1992

Approved by



Dr. David Strahan
Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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June 30, 1997
Date of Acceptance by Committee

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JONES, JEANNEINE PETERSEN, Ed.D. Using Realistic Fiction to Enhance Social Decision Making in Middle Grades Students (1992). Directed by Dr. David Strahan. 426 pp.

The purpose of this study was to describe how a literature-based curriculum influenced middle grades students' perceptions of the social decisions that they may make.

This eight-week study initially explored the decision-making agendas that were employed by 28 seventh-grade reading students. The study's curriculum then introduced 31 novels which featured literary peers who were immersed in social decision-making situations that were analogous to the students' concerns. Each student read six novels of choice, examined the decisions that the characters made, and then compared the characters' decisions to their own. A systematic model for decision making served as structure for the analysis. The study concluded with the students again discussing their personal agendas, particularly in regard to the influence of realistic fiction.

Data was gathered through a host of written classroom assignments and analyzed qualitatively. An overview of the entire class was reported, with four case studies detailing the evolution of the students' decision-making agendas.

An analysis of the data revealed growth toward a more systematic approach to decision making, with an enhanced awareness of consequences over an initial need for immediate gratification. Further, 86% of the students involved stated

that realistic fiction was an appropriate basis for consultation when difficult social decisions arise.

Conclusions drawn from this analysis include:

1. It would seem that these 28 young adolescents are developmentally capable of both understanding and implementing a structured approach to decision making.

2. Realistic fiction can perhaps serve as a successful foundation to reading within the contemporary middle grades classroom.

3. Both an enhanced approach to decision making and a fondness for pleasure reading can possibly transfer from classroom into life, in at least a majority of students.

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I offer thanks, as well, to my family and closest friends, who have come to know that they, too, have invested a great portion of their lives and spirit in both this degree and this document. We will all be happy to have time together again. Of these, a special note of appreciation to Janet, who continues to share both her professional wisdom and her heart. To my parents, who have never asked more than they were willing to give. And above all, endless amazement and lasting celebration in the name of my husband, Michael: You are truly a survivor.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

"Growing Up"

Life gets so confusing
And hard to figure out
I'm growing up so fast,
What's it all about?
Things are changing quickly,
Time is flying by.
I'm becoming a different person,
Sometimes I wonder why.
Sometimes it gets real scary,
And I want to run away.
But I know things will fit
Together...
Somehow, sometime, someday.
--a young adolescent

Growing... Changing... Becoming... Young adolescents are indeed a unique and complex collection! They come into the middle grades sporting an assortment of shapes and sizes, and they bring with them an overwhelming amount of emotional baggage. This, in turn, leads to a deluge of personal decisions which often stem from the roller coaster emotions that are characteristic of the young adolescent's development. Without proper role modeling and structured guidance, many of these children make hasty choices that are negative in consequence. These negative decisions leave middle grades teachers to face what is perhaps one of the most frightening challenges in our society's history: students who are ill-

prepared to meet the myriad demands posed by 21st century America. One underlying factor in this problem is a lack of effective decision-making strategies among many of our country's youth. These inadequate strategies touch every facet of their development, including both their academic and social worlds.

Research based directly on adolescent surveys is sobering indeed, for it paints an explicit picture of these inadequate decision makers. For example, a federal commission of health, medical, and business leaders reported the following in the spring of 1990 (Mesce):

One million teenage girls, nearly one in ten, get pregnant each year.

Thirty-nine percent of high school seniors reported they had gotten drunk within the two previous weeks.

The suicide rate for teens has doubled since 1968.

Teenage arrests are up thirty fold since 1950.

Homicide is the leading cause of death among 15 to 19-year-old minority youths (p. 1A).

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) addressed this national dilemma in its report Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century. Organized by the Carnegie Corporation in 1986, the Council "...crystallized much of the thinking and research base about desirable schooling for this age group. Turning Points, in essence, is the philosophical statement of the middle school movement"

(Lewis, 1991). This report, which is pivotal in its vision of schooling and adolescent needs, stated that

there is a crucial need to help adolescents at this early age to acquire...a basis for making informed, deliberate decisions-- especially on matters that have large consequences, such as educational futures and drug use.

The challenge for educational and related institutions is...to help provide the building blocks of adolescent development and preparation for adult life. Yet most American junior high and middle schools do not meet the developmental needs of young adolescents....We have tolerated this situation for many years, but now our society is changing dramatically. Young adolescents are far more at risk for self-destructive behaviors-- educational failure, drug and alcohol abuse, school age pregnancy, contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, violence-- than their age group ever was before. Our schools are simply not producing young adolescents who have learned to adopt healthy lifestyles...higher skill levels and problem-solving abilities... (pp. 12-13).

The North Carolina Middle Grades Task Force (1990) was organized in response to the Carnegie Council's challenge for school reform. Its report Last Best Chance laid the groundwork for a close inspection of this state's middle level schools. Included in its description of education in North Carolina are the following facts which serve as illustration of these "self-destructive behaviors:"

The schools in this state currently serve 244,111 of these developing young adolescents, grades 6-8. A 1989 random survey of seventh and eighth graders revealed 23.3% of them had consumed alcohol within the past 30 days, and 5.1% were getting drunk on a regular basis. Additionally, 6% indicated marijuana use and 1.2% cocaine use within the past 30 days.

The year 1988 recorded 822 pregnancies and 459 induced abortions among girls ages 10 to 14. Additionally, this age group contracted 567 reported cases of gonorrhea. Seventy young adolescents died from injuries, and an additional 61 were killed in vehicular and drowning accidents.

The year 1987 reported 51 suicides in the 10 to 19 age category, and 3 of these were children under the age of 14 years. Experts in the field tell us, further, that there are 3 unsuccessful suicide attempts for each one completed and that 60% of all teens have seriously considered taking their own lives (pp. 11-12).

These illustrations serve to underscore the need for improved decision-making skills among this state and nation's young adolescents. All too often these children engage in behaviors which result in life-altering consequences such as those cited by Last Best Chance. As was suggested by the Carnegie Council, and agreed upon by North Carolina's Middle Grades Task Force, "there is a crucial need to help adolescents at this early age to acquire...a basis for making informed, deliberate decisions-- especially on matters that have large consequences, such as educational futures and drug use" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 12).

This research study acknowledged and addressed this "crucial need" for enhanced decision making among young adolescents, particularly in the social arena where so many of these decisions with "large consequences" occur. In order to

do this, the study delved into adolescent decision making as it was described by a group of seventh grade reading students. The results of the eight week study focused on the ways in which a literature-based curriculum influenced these young adults' perceptions of the social decisions that they make now, and those which they may face in their remaining adolescent years.

Conceptual Base for the Study

In order to provide a framework for understanding the need for this curriculum, and its potential effectiveness in both the classroom and the adolescent's personal domain, three major areas were reviewed: young adolescent development and decision making, successful approaches to school curriculum, and realistic fiction in the middle grades classroom.

Early Adolescent Development and Decision Making

Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood (Santrock, 1986), from fluctuation to stability, from confusion to awakening. Because it is so prolonged, it is often subdivided into three stages: early adolescence (ages 10 years through 14-15 years), middle adolescence (through the high school years), and late adolescence (18 years and older) (Santrock, 1986; Hillman, 1991).

Although children in early adolescence sometimes seem to be similar in developmental growth, nothing could be farther from the truth (Hillman, 1991). Professionals who study them note that "...these students...have little in common but the fact of changing development itself" (George, 1991, p. 4). For example, "some girls at this age may have already given birth, while others are still waiting for the onset of puberty. Reading levels range from second grade to early college levels, with thinking ranging from concrete to mature adult forms" (Hillman, 1991, p. 4).

Much research has been conducted which focuses on this diversity of early adolescent development as it relates to physical, sexual, social and emotional, and intellectual growth. This divergence in development has a profound effect on the way in which a young adolescent views her/himself. This, in turn, affects the social decisions that the individual makes.

Physical Development and Decision Making

Researchers recognize this point in the life span as a time of rapid physical growth (Thornburg & Aras, 1986). Triggered by hormonal secretions, puberty awakens a barrage of changes in both males and females. For example, Van Hoose and Strahan (1987) reported that the average young adolescent grows from 10 to 20 inches in height and often gains as much as 50 pounds of weight during these years. Additionally, tail

bones develop, knee caps take shape, and pituitary glands shoot out irregular bursts of adrenalin that can power the child the length of a football field 10 times without stopping to rest.

It is this varying rate of growth which often causes sensitive and insecure young adolescents to lapse into patterns of self-consciousness, self-absorption, embarrassment, and shame (Wood & Hillman, 1992). This physical fluctuation and emotional sensitivity can, in turn, lead to ambivalence, confusion, and impulsive behavior in the emerging teenager's decision-making habits.

Sexual Development and Decision Making

The onset of puberty leads to dramatic changes in sexual development, as well, and this in turn often prompts the early initiation of sexual encounters. This early entry into sexual relationships is well documented by those who study the choices of this age group. The consequences are devastating.

The North Carolina Middle Grades Task Force (1990), in a 1988 review of this state's young adolescents, reported that there were "...822 reported pregnancies and 459 induced abortions...for girls 10 to 14 years of age" (Last Best Chance, p. 12). Further, Hayes (1987) added that 60,000 babies are born each year in America to girls under 15 years.

The Carnegie Council clearly warned educators that these early sexual encounters carry other consequences, as well.

Besides the risk of pregnancy, young people are in serious jeopardy of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Fully one-fourth of all sexually active adolescents will become infected with a sexually transmitted disease before graduating from high school, a grave situation that makes AIDS a potential timebomb for millions of American youth (p. 25).

Social and Emotional Development and Decision Making

As children grow into the adolescent years, they begin to pull away from parental structure and seek companionship with the age mates who comprise their peer groups. These groups serve a variety of purposes that all lend themselves to the healthy social and emotional growth of emerging young adults.

For example, it is within the safety of the peer group that children interact with age mates and develop appropriate social skills, such as cooperation and healthy competition. Peer relationships take on the characteristics of adult relationships, and therefore prepare children for the challenges of the adult world. These adolescent peer groups become heterosexual in nature which, too, is like the adult world. Social skills and morality begin to take permanent shape. This group also provides the opportunity for social comparison and self-evaluation (Dusek, 1991).

Peer groups heavily influence both the decision-making and socialization processes in young adolescents. As a result, the emotional component comes into play. As if in response to this statement, two of this study's participants shared these remarks about their friends.

They really influence my decisions. Most people really want to fit in with their friends. So a lot of people make decisions so their friends will still like them...

--Danny

Friends are sometimes important and sometimes they try to pick on each other and fuss at one another. Sometimes friends try to make each other's decisions for them. Some are wrong. Some are right. When your friend does something bad or good, they expect you to do it, too. Most of the times friends are there for each other, good times and bad.

--Tonya

Intellectual Development and Decision Making

Dramatic changes in thought processing occur in the early teenage years and these, too, govern the degree to which the young student feels accepted and successful; therefore, they often play a critical role in the way a young adult approaches a decision-making situation.

Young adolescence awakens the ability to eventually engage in both multiple problem solving and abstract thinking skills (Hillman, 1991). The ability to reason abstractly and consider multiple possibilities bears heavy implication for the enhancement of social decision making in the emerging teenager. This adolescent can project self into social situations where no previous experience has been had. S/he can therefore give serious consideration to multiple choices and consequences before the event occurs. S/he is then better prepared for decision-making challenges when they arise.

McEwin and Thomason (1989) cautioned that making adjustments to this new way of thinking is often difficult for adolescents, however, and can affect the ways in which they view other areas of their development. For example, changes in intellectual development often precede physical growth; thought processes can therefore dictate the attitude with which adolescents anticipate and accept their rapid, and diverse, physical development.

Designing a Successful Curriculum

Many middle level professionals strongly advocate an innovative curriculum which addresses these developmental differences, concerns, and influences (among others, Van Hoose & Strahan, 1987; Lounsbury, 1991a and 1991b; Merenbloom, 1988; Beane, 1991; Lipsitz, 1984; Stevenson, 1991; McDonough, 1991; the Carnegie Council, 1989; North Carolina Middle Grades Task Force, 1990; Arnold, 1991; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). Lounsbury (1991b) declared that "...American education has continued to give homage to a curriculum that was established in the last century under vastly different circumstances and for a markedly different clientele" (p. 3).

Acknowledging the inadequacies of the present curriculum, particularly in light of these developmental differences and poor decision-making agendas, has led many to research more appropriate avenues for preparing American youth for the challenges of the 21st century. It was noted that this

improved middle level curriculum must be "rich in meaning" (Arnold, 1991, p. 8). It must likewise be interdisciplinary and thematic, which will enable students to see the "wholeness of learning" (Merenbloom, 1988, p. 51).

Participants in the Middle Level Curriculum Project (McDonough, 1991) affirmed that it "...can and will meet young adolescents and their teachers where they are at any moment in their development. It will extend their world to encompass what lies beyond the school walls" (p. 29). Organized in the spring of 1990, this cadre of teachers, administrators, state department personnel, and university professors agreed that this vision of the successful middle level curriculum is "...of and for the young adolescent...which embraces and addresses the social meanings sought by them and all members of the school community" (p. 29).

Realistic Fiction and the Successful Curriculum

Contemporary educators recognize the need to incorporate an adolescent's developmental needs, decision-making requirements, and relevant interests into this improved middle level curriculum if schools are to indeed produce young adults who are prepared to meet the demands of a changing society.

The use of realistic fiction in the classroom can provide a catalyst to meet this need. It introduces the young adolescent to enhanced decision-making skills through the examination of a world where the characters live the same

confusions, struggle with the same dilemmas, and resolve the same conflicts. Like the student, these adolescent characters are immersed in developmental diversities and decision-making situations. There is no doubt that this literature is relevant to these students; it is a mirror image of the world in which they live.

This study explored realistic fiction as it related to the decision-making agendas of a class of seventh grade students. Its purpose was to describe how this genre influenced these students' perceptions of the social decisions that they may make.

It secured this description by weaving realistic fiction into the existing reading curriculum in this seventh grade classroom. The selected books featured a variety of social issues which the characters encountered and addressed. Appropriate follow-up activities encouraged both written and verbal class discussions of first the characters' and then the students' decision making.

In order to select appropriate books for this study, a number of criteria were employed. Rudman (1984) underscored the importance of careful scrutiny, for she reminded educators that "...we have within our power the means to inculcate values, develop skills, influence attitudes, and affect the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and moral development of today's youth and tomorrow's adults" (p. 1). She cautioned that educators making book selections for the

classroom should lend a critical eye to the presentation of issues and the possibility of inherent negative messages. She further urges instructors to teach children to become critics, as well, thus empowering them to make later selections.

Included in Rudman's (1984) discussion are the following criteria, which were generalized in order to serve as guides for book selection in this study.

1. The book must mirror the child's developmental level.
2. The reader should be able to identify with the characters and plot because they are realistic, accurate, and of interest to the student. This includes parental, peer, and sibling interactions, as well as setting.
3. The solutions presented must be realistic. Fairy tale endings and answers which are "too pat" are not valuable to the contemporary child.
4. Values should be communicated clearly, and with an acknowledgement that these are a part of the author. Guilt should not be imposed on the reader if agreement is not felt. Opinions should be viewed as such.
5. Illustrations, if used, should portray real people in real situations, for they, too, convey a message.
6. The literary quality should be viewed as one of the most important factors in selection, for it will greatly affect the book's impact on the reader.
7. In nonfiction, the book should transmit an appropriate amount of information, and it should be accurate.

In addition to Rudman's suggestions, this researcher gave careful attention to the following:

1. Interest levels of the books, as provided by the publisher (included a wide variety);
2. Readability levels of the books, as noted by the publisher (included titles from easy to challenging);
3. Books already included on this school's sixth and eighth grade reading lists (avoided overlapping titles);
4. Authors popular with middle school readers (included many; for example, Lois Duncan and Gary Paulsen);
5. A similar number of male and female characters, with attention given to multicultural backgrounds as found within this classroom; and
6. Books that featured both good and poor decision making (in order to facilitate discussion according to the study's purpose).

Statement of the Problem

Young adolescents today make fateful choices, fateful for them and for our nation. The period of life from ages 10 to 15 represents for many young people their last best chance to choose a path toward productive and fulfilling lives.

--The Carnegie Council
(1989, p. 20)

Unfortunately, today's teens do indeed make "fateful choices" during this turning point in their lives, and these

choices all too often result in undesirable, and even harmful, social and academic behaviors.

The problem addressed by this study was the need for an innovative and more relevant strategy which could be used in schools by teachers, and which could have a helpful impact on the decision-making experiences of young adolescents. It should enhance the students' abilities to either avoid or appropriately cope with situations which lead to unwanted pregnancies, alcohol and tobacco abuse, suicide, and a myriad of other unhealthy circumstances.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe how a literature-based curriculum influenced middle grades students' perceptions of the social decisions that they may make. This curriculum introduced effective decision-making strategies through the use of literary role models. The study described the students' responses to these role models by focusing on the characters' decision-making techniques. It then analyzed and described these responses in terms of the students' personal decision-making agendas.

The results serve a two-fold audience: middle grades teachers who are seeking approaches which might enhance their own classroom programs, and developing young adolescents who are in need of a personal decision-making strategy.

Research Questions

In order to address the purpose of this study, the following questions provided a framework for exploration:

1. How do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors which influence their choices?

2. How do young adolescents describe young adolescent characters in selected realistic fiction?

3. When presented with a systematic framework for making decisions, how do young adolescents apply this framework to the analysis of situations in realistic fiction?

4. After a series of lessons that explore decision making using realistic fiction, how do young adolescents describe their own decision-making processes and the factors that influence their choices?

Significance of the Study

The need for a change in decision-making strategies becomes obvious as one reviews the social lives of the adolescents in this state and, indeed, in all of American society. Current curriculums do not seem to be meeting adolescent needs for effective decision making strategies, as statistics focusing on the social resolves of this age group continue to explode in negative directions. Those who teach

these children have found themselves thrust into a position that demands attention to these social dynamics.

One avenue that enhances more effective decision making among young adolescents is the use of realistic fiction in the classroom. When implemented in this study, this particular strategy involved the planned use of specific books with a variety of selected themes and appropriate follow-up activities. It was assumed that this use of literature would also spill over into a student's personal time, and would thus become a viable resource for sharpened decision-making skills.

This particular study holds significance in the middle school arena for a number of reasons:

1. The study contributes to the demand for a more student-centered curriculum, one which is both developmentally appropriate and student responsive.

2. The use of realistic fiction cultivates literacy development in the adolescent. Unfortunately, by the time children reach their middle school years, many of them are no longer interested in books. Most can read, but rarely choose to do so on a regular basis. Introducing realistic fiction into the classroom is not only relevant, but is also stimulating, and it can encourage the reluctant reader to willingly immerse her/himself in print on a regular basis.

3. This curriculum empowers the student. It provides an arena of private perusal for a dilemma or situation, and allows for greater control over the decision which ensues.

Definitions of Terms

These terms were referenced by the researcher in the following way during the course of this study:

1. **ADOLESCENT (or young adult) LITERATURE:** That body of literature which holds special points of identification for the adolescent. For example: characters of a similar age, dilemmas or situations to which the adolescent can relate, familiar family concerns, and common settings.

2. **BOOKTALK:** The sharing of a portion of a book so that one is intrigued and becomes interested in reading the same (or similar) material. A booktalk involves enough practice so that it seems informal and conversational, yet is fast-paced and believable. It may be a plot summary, a retelling of a scene, or simply the sharing of a specific passage from the book. (The ending is never revealed in fiction.)

3. **CONSEQUENCE:** The result of a decision which has been made and implemented. The consideration of consequences is a vital component in an enhanced decision-making agenda. This study divided this term into three distinct areas:

- A. **Immediate gratification:** of the moment and with regard only for instant personal satisfaction; for example, a quick decision to join peers in drinking or shoplifting
- B. **Short-range consequence:** effects seen within a period of time; for example, punishment by authority figure or damage to reputation
- C. **Long-range consequence:** impacting on the future quality of life; for example, tobacco or alcohol abuse as detrimental to health.

4. COMPANION NOVELS (or companion books): Those books which are similar in some way to the one currently being read. A companion novel or book may be any number of related things, including another title by the same author, a novel with an analogous theme, or a sequel. These companion books may be fiction, nonfiction, works of poetry, drama, short stories, or other relevant printed materials.

5. CONTEMPORARY TEEN: An adolescent who is a member of the current society, and thus is faced with any number of current decision-making situations and dilemmas. For example: peer pressure, early sexual experimentation, drug usage, heavy media influence, single parent homes and blended families, personal confusions about body development, financial misgivings, and illiteracy.

6. DECISION MAKING: A systematic and developmental approach to the resolution of a dilemma or situation; a judgment call, in that one selects what one considers to be the best choice from among alternatives. Often one does not discover if the best choice was made until time has passed and the dilemma or situation becomes more objectively focused.

Good decision-making skills should be internalized so that the person who is making the final decision is both comfortable with her/his approach and can use it spontaneously if the dilemma or situation demands. Based on the research studies which were reviewed in Chapter II of this document, it seems that suggested approaches share common sequential

components. For example, Janis and Mann (1977); Mann, Harmoni, and Power (1989); and Durrant, Frey, and Newbury (1991) agree that a systematic approach to mature decision making includes

- A. An identification of the problem or dilemma at hand
- B. A mapping out of several possible solutions based on information gathered
- C. A recognition of the consequences for each of the solutions considered
- D. Reflection as to each possible consequence and how it affects one's convictions and values system
- E. A determination as to which solution best resolves the situation or dilemma, and
- F. An evaluation and acceptance (or reworking) of the choice made so that one might continue to learn and grow from one's experiences.

7. **DILEMMA:** This involves a set of circumstances which require that a choice be made. The decision must be pulled from solutions which always result in undesirable consequences; therefore, one must choose "the best of the worst." For example: Members of a peer group are drinking at a friend's home while the parents are away. The adolescents are urging one another to take part, and each does. One member objects to the drinking and is taunted to participate. Thus the child is forced to drink, endure the ostracism that results from refusal, or develop some other coping mechanism.

8. **PROBLEM SOLVING:** Problem solving is similar to decision making, yet it relies less on judgment, values clarification, and the achievement of developmental plateaus. Rather, it is more of an objective analysis of the situation

at hand. Steps similar to those discussed with decision making are also appropriate: an identification of the problem, a mapping out of possible solutions based on information gathered, a recognition of the consequences for each of the solutions considered, reflection as to each consequence, and finally, a selection of the best choice.

9. PROCESS APPROACH TO WRITING: This approach focuses on the process that is undertaken when one produces a piece of writing. A process approach is viewed in opposition to a strict interest in only the final product.

Teachers may reference any number of steps. This researcher advocates the following, with brief explanations:

- A. Prewriting: Selecting topic and setting loose agenda
- B. Drafting: Capturing the words on paper, first to last, with no concern for conventions
- C. Peer Reviewing: Sharing and critiquing writings in structured writing groups
- D. Revising: Reconceptualizing drafts based on the refocus provided by both oneself and the group
- E. Editing and Evaluating: Cleaning up conventions and assessing a degree of satisfaction
- F. Publishing: Sharing final products in any number of ways, from book publication to audio-taping, or simply reading from an Author's Chair.

10. REALISTIC FICTION: Those novels which deal with issues that are relevant to the contemporary teen. These issues might include such things as: eating disorders, peer pressure, parents, death and grief, sexual experimentation, accepting the changing body, and drug usage.

11. RESPONSE TO LITERATURE: Reader response is both personal and powerful. It records one's private reactions to printed material based on the schemata that each brings to the literature involved. It connects the individual student with the story, thus enabling the child to grasp hold of the literature and make it personal.

More than factual recall, literary response is quite valuable in the reading and/or language arts curriculum. It helps to develop critical thinking skills, improve both verbal and written fluency, encourage discussion, and provide a vehicle for introspection. (A word of caution: The response must come solely from the child, rather than as the result of an instructor's biased probing.)

12. SITUATION: This involves a set of circumstances which present a concern to the student, or which prove to be a source of frustration or anxiety. For the emerging adolescent, a situation may introduce circumstances which cannot be controlled or avoided. Thus the child must learn to cope with it, gather the courage to remove her/himself from the situation all together, or seek other alternatives which may be difficult to obtain due to various factors (age, finances, mobility, etc.). For example: A family's socioeconomic status, certain aspects of one's appearance, or physical and emotional abuse as found within a relationship.

13. SOCIAL DECISION: A decision which generally stems from a situation or dilemma involving people other than one's

self, especially one's peers. This also includes a decision made and acted upon when one is alone, yet which opens the door for later discussion and retelling while within the peer group. This type of decision generally affects one's welfare or the welfare of the group, either positively or negatively. For example, the dilemma might focus on cheating in school, shoplifting, slandering another's reputation, or temptations involving drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, or sexual encounters.

14. TEACHER: Janelle L. Timmons, the teacher whose classroom provided the setting for this study.

15. RESEARCHER: Jeanneine P. Jones

16. YOUNG ADOLESCENT: Those children who are between the years of 10 and 15.

Assumptions

As both teacher and researcher, I bring a long-lasting interest into the study of this topic. Having taught for 15 years in an eighth grade classroom, I acknowledge that the following assumptions, biases, and observations are an intrinsic part of my mindset:

1. The majority of middle school students are faced with decisions that are, at least on occasion, overwhelming to them because of the consequences of their choices. Because they rarely employ systematic strategies for considering these

choices, they act impulsively and tend to look only at the implications for immediate gratification.

2. Most middle school students feel a deep need to belong to a peer group, and many will do almost anything to achieve this priority goal. This often includes compromising their own childhood moral instruction.

3. Within every middle school student is a confusing blend of child and young adult. During this stage in the life span, growth into maturity can be guided by a teacher who is aware of the adolescent's developmental needs, and who acknowledges the higher priority of meeting those needs as opposed to an uninvolved rote teaching of basal curriculum. Though there have been few of these teachers in the past, the numbers are beginning to increase rapidly. Their demand for assistance in appropriate curriculum development is rapidly increasing, as well.

4. This middle school philosophy of matching appropriate curriculum to the developmental stages of the adolescent must continue into high school, as must the attitude of teacher as nurturer, instructor, and classroom supervisor. If not, children will find the transition from eighth to ninth grade confusing because of the mixed messages and traditional teaching styles that they encounter. This may leave them feeling as though they have been "thrown to the wolves," and cause them to pull even deeper into themselves and their peer

groups. This makes the need for an intrinsic, useful decision-making strategy even more desperate.

5. Because reading a book in private is "safe" from public scrutiny, and because the discussion of its characters among friends and self is "safe" from adult intervention, and because there just might be a relevant thought or two hidden somewhere within its pages, adolescents will turn to print for guidance in their own lives. This awakening to the value of literature must be carefully modeled and systematically pursued by someone whom the student trusts and respects. The classroom teacher is in an excellent position to do this; however, this same instructor must be ever aware of the child-like vulnerability that still lives within the developing adolescent.

How This Study Addressed These Assumptions

It is difficult to describe something as personally intrinsic as a teacher's understanding of good classroom practices. As teacher turned researcher, I applied a critical eye toward my assumptions, biases, and past observations in order to counterbalance them during the course of this study. Mrs. Timmons, the students' teacher, served as a monitor for my presumptions, and I remained conscious of careful personal and student scrutiny, as well.

Three examples serve as clarification for the ways in which I addressed this discussion of teaching concerns.

1. I have observed through former students that many adolescents make hasty choices based on the need for peer group approval. This study therefore introduced a systematic approach to decision making and allowed the students to explore it, in part, through collaborative work in peer group settings. This provided a sense of mature structure while encouraging individuality within a friendship circle. Many later remarked that they began to consider personal consequences first and peer approval second, as they became comfortable discussing conflicting opinions and analyzing the outcomes of their choices.

2. Always aware of a teacher's influence on the developing adolescent, I thoroughly researched both the growing child and appropriate curriculum development before I began this study. I also solicited the help of their classroom teacher in order to ensure that every book and every activity was carefully matched to the individual needs of the children. Further, the students were asked to submit personal evaluations of the study on three different occasions and their suggestions were respected and followed when possible.

3. I have also been long concerned with the observation that most middle school students refuse to read unless they are required to, and even then many chose to ignore assignments which involve reading. Following the suggestions of both Rudman (1984) and Abrahamson (cited in Holbrook, 1982), I made careful literary selections. The books all

dealt with realistic characters who were immersed in dilemmas and situations that were of relevant interest to these students. Once the selections were made, I booktalked each of the novels in an appealing way. The students were allowed to freely choose half of the titles which they read.

By keeping the books relevant, and by adding the element of choice and thus personal control, the reading program became enticing to the students. Because they found themselves introduced to a world where the characters were similar to themselves, the bond with the realistic fiction was very strong. I therefore anticipate that at least a majority portion of the students will choose to read over the summer months and perhaps beyond. This will continue to provide a source of consultation for safe decision making, as well.

A Summary of Chapters I through V

Chapter I:

Chapter I provided both an introduction and an overview of this study. In doing so, it addressed what is perhaps one of the most frightening aspects of our society's development: students who are ill-prepared to meet the increasingly complex challenges posed by 21st century America. These students are often unprepared as the result of ineffective decision-making strategies in their social world. This study directly confronted this complex dilemma by describing how a

literature-based curriculum enhanced the social decisions that middle grades students may make.

Chapter II:

Chapter II provided a full framework on which to hang the research base for this study. In doing so, it discussed three areas in relationship to young adolescents and the ways in which their needs may be successfully met in the middle school classroom. These areas of research included:

1. Young adolescent development and decision making, including influencing factors and common social decisions;
2. Appropriate approaches to middle grades curriculum, including an overview of successful schools, teachers, and curriculum as opposed to the realities of education; and
3. Reading instruction in successful schools, the state of reading in America, and the possible relationship of realistic fiction to adolescent decision making.

Three key issues emerged from within this review of the research literature. These concerns include:

1. The need to further explore Harren's belief (cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983) that young adolescents are developmentally capable of implementing a structured approach to decision making;
2. The need to investigate realistic fiction as a possible foundation to reading within the middle grades.

curriculum, thus employing it as a vehicle for better understanding the adolescent social world; and

3. The need to approach both decision making and reading in ways that encourage their transfer from classroom to private life.

Chapter II closed with a detailed description of the research-based curriculum which was developed for this study.

Chapter III:

Chapter III described both the methodology and the procedures which were dictated by the needs of this study.

In doing so, the chapter first discussed qualitative research methodology. It was noted that the employment of this approach best describes the complex and often confusing world of the developing adolescent. Special focus was placed on case study methodology within the naturalistic paradigm. This technique was applied to the individual stories of 4 young adults from within the larger group of 28 students.

A discussion of the study's procedures detailed the context for the study and the selection of its participants, including Mrs. Janelle Timmons and her reading class. Data collection instruments were highlighted, as were the data gathering procedures for this eight-week study. Data analysis was accomplished according to the guidelines set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and these were discussed in

relationship to this particular study. The chapter closed with a summary of the study's design.

Detailed appendices to this document included all data collection instruments and a copy of the classroom agenda from the researcher's reflexive journal. Included with this agenda was a sample curriculum, all parent meeting information, the systematic decision-making model which was employed, and annotations of all novels read.

Chapter IV:

This chapter reported the results of the data that was gathered according to the details discussed in Chapter III. Six sections were featured in this chapter, including:

1. An introduction of the participants and their world, including both school setting and classroom teacher;
2. The students' initial descriptions of social decisions that they had recently made;
3. A discussion of the study in progress;
4. The students' closing views of decision making based on their interactions with realistic fiction;
5. How these student views evolved: Case studies in decision making; and
6. An evaluation of the study as shared by both the students and their teacher, including reports from the final member check.

Chapter V:

This concluding chapter examined the class as a group of decision-aware individuals through both the research questions posed in Chapter I and the key issues which arose from the review of literature in Chapter II. This chapter then addressed the study's limitations. Lastly, implications for teaching and further research were discussed, and the chapter closed with final thoughts from the researcher.

CHAPTER II
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to describe how a literature-based curriculum influenced middle grades students' perceptions of the social decisions that they may make. In order to provide a framework for understanding the need for this strategy, and its potential effectiveness in both the classroom and the adolescent's personal domain, three areas of the literature were reviewed, and then an appropriate curriculum was developed. The first of these areas focused on young adolescent development and decision making. The second area highlighted successful approaches to middle school curriculum. The third area reviewed the use of realistic adolescent fiction as an integral part of the successful reading curriculum in middle level schools. The chapter closed with a description of the research-based curriculum which was developed for this study.

Young Adolescent Development and Decision Making

Young adolescents face significant turning points. For many youth 10 to 15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life. For many others, it represents their last best chance to avoid a diminished future.

--Carnegie Council, 1989, p.8

Recent years have brought considerable attention to adolescent development, as those interested in better serving this age group have searched for a deeper understanding of the changes that occur during this period of growth. During this time adolescents begin to pull further into their peer groups and the society which surrounds them, as they come to acknowledge themselves as changing individuals who will soon face the opportunities and dilemmas of adulthood. Educators accept this as both a turning point in the life span, and as a period of heightened decision making.

Much research has been conducted which focuses on the diversity of adolescent development as it relates to physical, sexual, social and emotional, and intellectual growth. This diversity in development, when coupled with a personal understanding of it, has a profound effect on the way in which a young adolescent views her/himself. This in turn affects the types of social decisions that the individual makes.

Physical Development

Researchers recognize young adolescence as a time when growth rates exceed all other periods of development since those occurring during the first two years of life (Thornburg & Aras, 1986). Most children grow steadily from ages two to about 10 or 11, and then explode into a period of phenomenal physical growth (Wood & Hillman, 1992). For example, Van Hoose and Strahan (1987) reported that the average young

adolescent grows 10 to 20 inches in height and often gains 40 to 50 pounds of weight during these years. Additionally, these same adolescents grow tail bones and knee caps, and their pituitary glands shoot out irregular bursts of adrenalin that can power them the length of a football field 10 times without their stopping to rest.

This onset of rapid physical development stems from the beginnings of puberty which commences, on the average, at age 10.12 in girls and 12.76 in boys (Wood and Hillman, 1992). The age of greatest variability in physical size and physiological development is approximately 13 (McEwin and Thomason, 1989), although girls have permanently lost their earlier growth advantages over boys by age 15 (Hillman, 1991).

These patterns of rapid growth are observed in five primary areas: height, weight, shoulder and hip width, and muscle strength. A composite sketch of these underscores the notation that girls enter their growth spurt before males, although they lose this advantage quickly. Girls begin this stage of development about 2 years before boys. At age 12 the average female is roughly 8 pounds heavier than her male counterpart, is taller than he, exhibits earlier shoulder growth, and experiences a greater increase in muscle strength (although generally females are at no point stronger than males) (Faust, 1977; Newman & Newman, 1986; Tanner, 1970; Tanner, 1972; Thornburg & Aras, 1986).

Age 17 paints quite a different picture, however, with the average male having grown 9 inches since the age of 12, to his female counterpart's 3 inches. Additionally, he will weigh 15 pounds more than she, have broader shoulders and narrower hips, and be in the midst of a peak period of muscle strength (Faust, 1977; Newman & Newman, 1986; Tanner, 1970; Tanner, 1972; Thornburg & Aras, 1986).

Adolescent physical development displays great variability among even those within the same age group, and it is this variability that often leads the emerging teen into patterns of self-consciousness, self-absorption, embarrassment, and shame (Wood & Hillman, 1992). These turbulent emotions can, in turn, lead to ambivalence, confusion, and impulsive behavior in the emerging adolescent's decision-making habits.

Sexual Development

Sexual growth is a powerful factor in the young teen's physical development, and it impacts self-esteem and thus social decision making, as well. To this end, Van Hoose and Strahan (1987) noted that this stage of development is prominent in both males and females, as the growth and initiation of the reproductive system becomes evident.

Breast development and a rounding of the hips characterize the most obvious physical development in young females, with the average girl entering this period of growth

at 10 to 11 years of age. Menarche typically begins at age 12.8, about 6 to 12 months after the initial height spurt. Male development occurs slightly later, with growth of both testicles and penis beginning between 12 and 13 years, and about 1 year before the onset of rapid body growth. Both sexes begin to deal with the outbreak of acne and increased body odor (Newman & Newman, 1986; Tanner, 1972; Thornburg & Aras, 1986).

Hillman (1991) reminded us that sexual encounters and conversations are highly important at this age, and he suggested that "youngsters who are not doing well in school and who have lower educational aspirations are more likely to be sexually active during early adolescence" (p. 7). Van Hoose and Strahan (1987) further reported that approximately 80% of males and 70% of females in this country will have had their first sexual encounter prior to leaving the adolescent years, and that the age group below 15 is the only one where teenage pregnancy is on the rapid rise. In fact, about 60,000 babies are born each year to adolescent girls under the age of 15 (Hayes, 1987). Gibbs (1990) explained this, in part, by stating that

even before their own bodies have matured, some children are considering sexual intercourse as a normal conclusion to boy-girl relationships. They begin to fear that they are "prudes" or potential homosexuals if they haven't had sexual relations at an early age. Peer pressure is dynamic and it plays on these two fears. Therefore, many children have intercourse long before they are emotionally ready (p. 30).

Both gender and racial differences come into play in this facet of development. Hillman (1991) found that "...while 60% of teenagers have experienced intercourse by ages 18-19, 42% of black males had intercourse by age 15" (p. 7).

The Carnegie Council's report on young adolescence, Turning Points (1989), provided both focus and summary for the sexual aspects of adolescent development. The Council found that

youth enter puberty at a significantly younger age today than in previous generations. In the United States 150 years ago, the average age of a girl's first menstrual period was 16 years; today it is 12.5 years. The change for boys is less pronounced but follows a similar trend. While they become biologically mature at earlier ages, many young adolescents remain intellectually and emotionally immature. Thus, young people 10, 11, and 12 years old are able to, and do, make fateful choices involving their own sexuality that can affect their entire life course (p. 21).

It is therefore noted again that the degree to which young adolescents understand their own development often governs the way in which they view themselves. This, in turn, affects the types of decisions that they make.

Social and Emotional Development

Sexual temptations and insecurities, reactions to rapid patterns of physical growth, mood swings, a fluctuation between dependence and independence, and a desperate search for sophistication are all common characteristics of the young adolescent's emerging social life and emotional development.

It is this social and emotional domain that is most heavily influenced by the other three areas of development, as peer acceptance and popularity often become synonymous with security and positive self-esteem. This quest for peer acceptance frequently governs the types of social decisions that students make.

Hillman (1991) defined the peer group as "a small single-sex similar age group" (p.6), although he continued by noting that most teens belong to any number of groups rather than just one. This social structure is of primary importance to the emerging adolescent's psychological well-being. Further, well-liked adolescents tend to be "active, successful, and happier" (p. 6). Hillman concluded by reporting that these peers often govern present issues, such as social activities and behaviors, while parents still exhibit great influence in matters of future concerns, for example career choice and financial aspirations. Unfortunately, it is this concern over present social issues that often results in unhealthy decisions, and these, in turn, can greatly impact the boundaries of career choice, financial aspirations, and other future opportunities.

McEwin and Thomason (1989) have contributed a great deal to the research on adolescent development, as well, and they agreed that interpersonal relationships become of paramount importance to the early adolescent, with peer groups gaining in emphasis and adults being viewed from a new perspective.

This perspective often concludes with the realization that "even the most trusted and loved adults are not perfect and cannot always be depended on" (p. 5).

McEwin and Thomason (1989) also corroborated the thought that social and emotional growth in the emerging teen is especially strong. Emotions often reach amazing depths, particularly in the areas of envy, spite, love, fear, frustration, and anger. Although these emotions are intense, they are often short-lived and thus "not as expensive personally as those found in late adolescence and adulthood" (p. 5). This dramatic stage of social and emotional development is often characterized by responses that are out of proportion to the event in question. For example, students may display intense feelings of shame and humiliation over the smallest of social situations (Wood & Hillman, 1990).

McEwin and Thomason (1989) acknowledged that the onset of adolescence brings with it a recognition of conscience, and thus a growing awareness of such values as fairness and honesty. Much of morality, however, is based more on that which has been "absorbed from the culture of the age group than from thoughtful meditation or reflection" (p. 6). Hillman (1991) added that these "youngsters strive toward socially responsible behaviors," and that "they are in the process of developing an ethical system to guide their behavior" (p. 7). Again, the way in which young adolescents emotionally view themselves and their places in the social

setting can have a direct bearing on the types of decisions that they make.

Intellectual Development

Dramatic changes in thought processing also occur in the early adolescent years. These, too, may govern the extent to which the young student feels accepted and successful, and they determine the degree to which s/he is capable of processing through difficult decisions.

Hillman (1991) recognized the ability to eventually engage in both multiple problem solving and abstract thinking skills. However, this time of intellectual growth, like physical and sexual development, occurs at varying rates. Although it is commonly recognized that concrete thinking abilities give way to more abstract patterns of thought at about age 12, Van Hoose and Strahan (1987) cautioned that only one-third of eighth graders consistently illustrate the ability to formally reason. To this end, Thornburg (1983) noted that "the capacity for formal or abstract thought, as defined by Piaget, is not occurring as early as previous writings have implied" (p. 81). Data from a study (Hammes & Duryea, 1986) involving 94 eighth through eleventh grade students, broke this down even further. It indicated that a greater proportion of males than females demonstrate abstract thinking. It also found that this ability increases with each grade level.

Researchers commonly recognize this correlation between cognitive development and decision-making abilities. Hammes and Duryea (1986) also corroborated the belief that

adolescence is the period when cognitive processes may or may not progress from concrete operations (literal) to formal operations (abstract). Mastery of abstract cognitive processes enables an individual to hypothesize or imagine the consequences or possible solutions to various problems and decisions. Consequently, individuals who have developed abstract thought processes theoretically have a more refined decision-making process than individuals functioning at the concrete level of operations (p. 224).

Abstract thinking is crucial to the ability to process through difficult decisions, particularly those which occur under stress, such as social situations involving smoking, drinking, and sex (Hammes & Duryea, 1986). The most crucial of these abstract cognitive processes are described by Mann (cited in Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989). These include:

1. Information search and processing (establish available options)
2. Problem-solving (find creative solution to dilemma)
3. Judgement (evaluate options and credibility of information)
4. Learning (realize the importance of full commitment)
5. Memory (recall relevant information so as to apply it to similar situations in the future) (p. 266).

Detailed knowledge of the area in which the decision is to be made is also crucial (Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989).

The adolescent who possesses these abstract thinking skills finds that it is possible to project her/himself into situations where no prior experience has been had. By doing

so, this child can successfully address hypothetical concepts, and s/he can therefore experience dramatically broader horizons of thinking (Hammes & Duryea, 1986; Seifert & Hoffnung, 1987). This has obvious potential for teaching young adolescents to anticipate, and thus prepare for, difficult social decisions which they may make.

McEwin and Thomason (1989) cautioned that making adjustments to this new way of thinking may be difficult for adolescents, and tends to bear a heavy effect on the ways in which they view their parallel physical development. This rapid expansion into the realm of higher level thinking, and thus a broader view of life, can have a negative impact on other developmental areas, as well. It often leaves adolescents with feelings of smallness and insignificance in a world that they recently felt they dominated (Wood & Hillman, 1992). Again the powers of intense emotional response come back into play, and one is reminded of the cyclical effects of all stages of development.

Recognizing these developmental differences and challenging individual growth in an appropriate fashion must be of primary importance to contemporary educators if the profession is to contribute to the healthy and successful advancement of decision making among young adolescents. The Carnegie Council noted that the "...critical reasoning skills of many American young adolescents are extremely deficient." They illustrated this statement by warning that "...only 11

percent of 13-year-olds were 'adept' readers" and that in tests of analytical or persuasive writing, "...only one in five 8th graders wrote adequate or better essays" (p. 27).

Young adolescents who are ill-prepared for their places in the global market will find that they face limited choices indeed. Again self-image and self-esteem are brought to mind, as is the social decision making that often ensues. The Carnegie Council cautioned that "the economy will increasingly have little use for youth who are impaired by high-risk behaviors or who are intellectually unprepared for the challenges of a changing economy" (p. 27).

In order to better understand why young adolescents may make decisions that result in these "high-risk behaviors or intellectual unprepared(ness)," it is necessary to look more closely at their decision-making agendas.

Young Adolescents and Decision Making

It was noted that many factors work together to influence the decision-making process in young adolescents, including physical, sexual, social and emotional, and intellectual development. In fact, Duryea (1986) suggested that one's place on the developmental span may contribute more heavily to decision making than any other factor, and that educators must therefore give it an appropriate amount of attention.

There is a growing body of research that has been conducted in the area of decision making among adolescents, as

those who are interested in better serving these children explore this domain. Of the research conducted, this study was most interested in three areas: some of the common approaches that adolescents employ when making decisions, those things which primarily influence their decision-making processes, and three examples of common decisions which have resulted in the Council's description of these "high-risk behaviors and intellectual unprepared(ness)."

Common Adolescent Approaches to Decision Making

In a review of more than 30 studies which spanned over 30 years, Schvaneveldt and Adams (1983) best crystallized the ambivalence that adolescents often feel when confronted with difficult decisions. In doing so, they pointed out society's contributions to teenage inadequacies and inexperience in the acquisition of decision-making skills.

Adolescence is thought to be the transitional stage of life prior to full maturity. It is a time, however, that is associated with limited experiences in decision making. During childhood, decision making was primarily done for them, and as participants in the second decade of life it is believed that they are either not ready or too inexperienced to carry such responsibility. Indeed an adolescent lives in a limited world. Except for attending school, virtually nothing else is legal or appropriate -- or so it seems to many adolescents. They are not to drop out of school, are discouraged from seeking employment, can't legally drink or smoke, should not drive until age 16, are discouraged from marriage, are prohibited from voting until age 18, cannot enlist in the armed services without a guardian's permission, and cannot legally gamble. With this background of inexperience in decision making and a weak status in family and society, the average adolescent is ill

prepared to strike out into the tumultuous world of decisions (p. 98).

Many researchers advocated a systematic approach to decision making as a way of better preparing this "average adolescent" for the situations and dilemmas of life. Among these was Harren (cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983), who felt that adolescents are developmentally capable of employing a structured strategy. He further believed that they are capable of choosing from among a variety of approaches, rather than feeling confined to just one. Among those which Harren proposed were popular with young adolescents were the planning style, the intuitive style, and the dependent style.

Planning style. Requiring ample time for research and evaluation, the planning style compels the decision maker to accumulate a wide variety of information, properly evaluate the situation, and then personally take responsibility for the ensuing decision. Two examples of similar approaches were found in the information-processing styles of both Janis and Mann (1977), and Durrant, Frey, and Newbury (1991).

The first example of a planning style approach was a prescriptive process developed by Janis and Mann (1977), one that was also advocated for use by Schvaneveldt and Adams (1983), Nelson (1985), and Mann, Harmoni, and Power (1989). In this system the decision maker:

1. Thoroughly canvasses a wide range of alternative courses of action

2. Surveys the full range of objectives to be fulfilled and the values implied by the choice
3. Carefully weighs whatever he or she knows about the costs and risks of negative consequences, as well as positive consequences that could flow from each alternative
4. Intensively searches for new information relevant to further evaluation of the alternatives
5. Correctly assimilates and takes account of any new information or expert judgment to which he or she is exposed, even when the information or judgment does not support the course of action he or she initially prefers
6. Reexamines the positive and negative consequences of all known alternatives, including those originally regarded as unacceptable, before making a final choice
7. Makes detailed provisions for implementing plans or executing the chosen course of action, with special attention to contingency plans that might be required if various known risks materialize (Nelson, 1985, p. 18).

Although detailed, deliberate, and perhaps even laborious for young adolescents to employ, Nelson (1985) defended this particular approach by noting that "while that very deliberateness may try the patience of the young people who want only 'the correct answer,' this model serves them far better than the plug-in-the-answer variety when they must make decisions later in their lives" (p. 18).

The second example of the planning style approach was labeled the DISCOVER Strategy for Decision Making (Durrant, Frey, & Newbury, 1991). It featured a much simpler, although similar, approach. This systematic strategy employs the use of an acronym that is readily remembered by children, DECIDE.

This word lends structure to the model, which relies on six steps:

1. Describe the problem
2. Explore to identify solutions to the problem.
3. Consider the consequences of each solution.
4. Identify the best solution.
5. Do it!
6. Evaluate your decision and learn from what happened.

Intuitive style. In contrast to the more precise nature of the planning style, the intuitive style (Harren, cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983) relies heavily on emotional ventures into both feelings and fantasy. The decision is based solely on "what feels right."

Dependent style. The third approach identified by Harren is the dependent style, which recognizes the heavy use of others' opinions and recommendations. The decision maker often takes little personal responsibility, relying on both others and the situation to define the variables used in approaching the decision.

"Good enough" style. Simon (1976) added the satisfaction, or "good enough" approach to these three styles. Although his approach relates chiefly to administrative policy making, it contributed to a fuller understanding of this "average adolescent" who was described by Schvaneveldt and Adams (1983).

Simon (1976) suggested that many times administrators arrive at decisions based more on what satisfies them than on

a systematic approach. This notion of what is "good enough" has implications for the young adolescent, for often they, too, review minimal criteria, noting that to assess more than the minimum is too time consuming. Few alternatives are reviewed. They therefore stop short with the decision by saying that their choice is "good enough."

Most commonly used styles. It was Schvaneveldt and Adams's (1983) contention that young adolescents actually combine bits and pieces of many approaches when making decisions. It was their belief that this age group relies most heavily on the intuitive and the "good enough" approaches to daily decision making, perhaps combining the two on occasion. Further, they found that most of these decisions involve routine chores, such as school activities, homework, clothing, music, peer interactions, and family matters. Longer-range decisions, such as career goals, marriage, and global issues are usually made later in the adolescent years. Adolescents then use a more systematic approach, yet still rely on a liberal dash of the "good enough" technique.

Broken down even further, Schvaneveldt and Adams (1983) hypothesized that male adolescents are more likely to employ the planning and "good enough" approaches, whereas females rely more heavily on the intuitive and "good enough" approaches. Further, several factors provide influence, including parents, siblings, peers, age, social class, sex,

the situation, and perceived opportunities presented by the specific event.

Decision making is a process, and developmental maturity and experience are crucial in an adolescent's ability to make sensible choices (Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989). This type of mature commitment often comes later in life when adolescents find that they no longer have to defend their independence. Having reached the legal age of adulthood, they find that they have both time and resources readily available which can help them to better plan major decisions. Further, as both Erikson and Kohlberg suggested, passing through even later stages of maturational development will continue to enhance the adolescent's decision-making abilities, particularly when these stages are compounded by experiences within the social world (Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983).

Assessing Decision-Making Competence

Just as it was important to review some common decision-making approaches, it was also important to examine criteria which can be used for evaluating competence in this area. It was found that both the approaches employed and the ensuing level of competence tend to affect attitudes concerning ownership of the decision-making process.

Mann, Harmoni, and Power (1989) focused much of their research on the cognitive aspects of decision making. They found that many adolescents, particularly those over age 15,

demonstrate a reliable level of understanding and competence in the decision-making process; however, they also noted that

young adolescents (12-14 years) are less able to create options, identify a wide range of risks and benefits, foresee the consequences of alternatives, and gauge the credibility of information from sources with vested interests. ...Barriers to achieving competence in decision-making during adolescence include attitudinal constraints (e.g., beliefs about the proper age for making decisions), peer group pressures to conformity, breakdowns in family structure and functioning, and restricted legal rights to make important personal decisions (e.g., to donate blood or body tissue) (p. 265).

By way of further explaining these barriers of attitudes, peers, and family, Mann, Harmoni, and Power (1984 study cited in Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989) reported that 24% of the 13-year-olds involved in their research, 22% of the 14-year-olds, and 9% of the 15-year-olds involved believed that decision making does not affect young people, or they were uncertain as to an opinion on this point. A small percentage of the 15-year-olds believed that all important decisions should be made solely by adults. The researchers suggested that perhaps the apparent reluctance of adolescents to become involved in the decision-making process is due to anxiety, hidden decisional conflicts, or the peer norm that it is "cool" to be unconcerned.

In order to clarify their use of the phrase "competence in decision making," Mann, Harmoni, and Power (1989) offered nine indicators of proficiency which draw from, yet go beyond,

the information-process requirements of Janis and Mann (1977).

Mann, Harmoni, and Power's nine indicators include:

1. Choice, which is decision control, or a willingness to choose;
2. Comprehension, or an understanding that decision-making is a cognitive process;
3. Creativity, which includes clarification and definition of the problem, generation of choice alternatives, combining choices to produce new alternatives, and acknowledging sequential steps that will lead to the appropriate choice;
4. Compromise, or modifying unobtainable ideal alternatives;
5. Consequentiality, which is considering consequences of choices;
6. Correctness, or using problem solving strategies in order to make the best choice;
7. Credibility, or checking new information against old information;
8. Consistency, which is evidence of stability in pattern of choices; and
9. Commitment, or follow through (pp. 267-271).

Ross (1981) also identified key components to "wise and compassionate decision-making," (p. 279), and he related them to the school setting. These include the more skills-conscious approach of:

1. Knowledge of the decision-making process, including a recognition of consequences;
2. Affective dispositions among teachers, who in turn work to instill in students a recognition of and a respect for the rights of others; responsibility; and
3. Information-processing skills, or the ability to obtain related sets of information and process them within a decision-making context (p. 279).

Ross found that the latter component is rarely taught, with the result being little growth exhibited in decision-making ability, grades 7 through 10. This common observation

was noted among researchers, as several expressed the concern that appropriate decision-making skills must become an important component in schools which cater to the developing adolescent (Duryea, 1986; Nelson, 1985; Carnegie Council, 1989; Hammes & Duryea, 1986; Mann, Harmoni & Power, 1989; Scales, 1990).

Scales (1990) was one of these, and he noted that such decisions as those leading to unwanted pregnancy, school dropout rates, and drug abuse could perhaps be prevented if focus is placed on the broad development of the behavioral, social, and cognitive abilities of the emerging teen. He suggested that when such things as teenage pregnancy, dropout rates, and the like occur among adolescents, they tend to occur in clusters rather than as isolated incidences. Scales cited statistics from the Carnegie Council's report, Turning Points, as illustration:

...a study from the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development estimated that 7 million children, age 10 to 17 years--one in every four--were at risk for at least one of the following: becoming an adolescent parent, failing in school, abusing drugs, and becoming delinquent. At least 3 million of these children-- one in every nine-- were at risk of all those things happening (p. 421).

One is again reminded of the integrated effects of all aspects of adolescent development, and the ways in which these various stages can affect decision making. The Carnegie Council continued to provide both focus and summary through a

description of the developing adolescent's world, particularly as it relates to their decision making skills.

In these times of rapid change, when young people face unprecedented choices and pressures, adult guidance is all too often withdrawn. Many parents, seeing that their child is developing in profound ways, mistake the stirring of independent thinking for the capacity to make adult decisions. They do not realize that their child's needs for autonomy require not rejection of filial bonds, but a realignment of roles and relationships within the family.

The young adolescent is moving from dependency to interdependency with parents, as well as with friends, relatives, and other persons outside the home. While renegotiating relationships with parents and other care-givers, often in outwardly stormy ways, the young person simultaneously seeks to maintain strong ties with exactly those people.

Freed from the dependency of childhood, but not yet able to find their own path to adulthood, many young people feel a desperate sense of isolation. Surrounded only by their equally confused peers, too many make poor decisions with harmful or lethal consequences (p. 22).

Thus two things become essential for educators at the middle level: to understand fully this world of the adolescent, and to incorporate competent decision-making skills into it. Both can be more readily accomplished by the educator who is abreast of current research and who maintains an integrated, child-centered curriculum.

Influences on Adolescent Decision Making

In order to focus on appropriate avenues for accomplishing these dual objectives of understanding adolescents and enhancing their decision-making skills, it was necessary to first review the factors which influence them.

These influences include many things, such as: siblings, parents, school, peers, sex, religious convictions, daily routines, and perceived opportunities. Also included are other situational factors which are generally beyond an adolescent's control, such as: fate, accidents, the family status and lifestyle, and ordinal position (Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983; Dusek, 1991; Santrock, 1986).

Of these many catalysts, two carry more influence than any others: parents and peers (Santrock, 1986; Mann, Harmoni, and Power, 1989; Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983; Dusek, 1991).

Parents. The composition of the American family has changed dramatically since the beginning of the twentieth century. This change has impacted the development of the young adolescent, and has thus influenced her/his decision-making competence, as well. Demographic attributes of the family, and changes in these characteristics over the last decade, paint the following portrait of the contemporary American family.

The median age of one's first marriage has been steadily increasing since 1980. It is now 23 years for females and 25 years for males, up from an earlier 21.8 years and 23.6 years respectively. This translates into an increase in the child-bearing age, which then means an increase in the age of parents when their offspring become adolescents (Dusek, 1991). For many, this puts adolescents in precarious positions within the family unit, for just as teens are beginning to struggle

with developmental changes, occupational choices, and the emotional acceptance of these issues, so too are their parents struggling with their own changing identities (Hill, 1980). This in turn often leads to escalated levels of conflict between parent and adolescent.

The Carnegie Council underscored the importance of controlling these escalated levels of parent-child conflict. They noted that a continuous and positive relationship is essential to the development of appropriate decision-making skills in the growing child.

In these changed times, when young people face unprecedented choices and pressures, all too often the guidance they needed as children and need no less as adolescents is withdrawn. Freed from the dependency of childhood, but not yet able to find their own path to adulthood, many young people feel a desperate sense of isolation. Surrounded only by their equally confused peers, too many make poor decisions with harmful or lethal consequences (p. 8).

It was also noted that although the family structure in and of itself is not the most critical feature in adolescent development (Dusek, 1987), parenting styles do play an important role in decision-making competencies. Dornbusch (et al., 1985) found that the parenting styles in the home had direct influence on the personalities of the adolescents who lived within them, and this in turn affected the decision-making agendas of these children. The authors based their research, in part, on Baumrind's (1971) categorization of parents as: authoritarian (unqualified power assertion),

permissive (few demands for impulse control or maturity on the part of the child), and authoritative (high level of demand coupled with high level of responsiveness to the child's needs).

Further explained, authoritarian parents tend to produce children who have low self-esteem and little empathy for others. These adults reserve decision making as their right solely, allowing the child freedom of choice only in later adolescent years.

A permissive style produces children who are impulsive, aggressive, and lacking in both social responsibility and independence. These parents allow their children to make unlimited decisions with no parental guidance.

Finally, an authoritative style, in contrast, produces adolescents who are socially responsible and self-assertive, and who are given early partnership in the decision-making agendas of the family.

Referencing a style similar to that of Baumrind's authoritative parent, Pulkkinen (1982) found that child-centered guidance by age 14 reduces truancy, the use of both alcohol and tobacco, and early dating. Further, these same child-oriented homes feature 20-year-olds who are non-excessive drinkers and who are not in legal straits.

This discussion of parenting styles was corroborated by several researchers who agreed that child-rearing practices can influence both the personality and decision-making skills

of an early adolescent. The authoritative style was found preferable because it makes the adolescent feel wanted and loved, and it provides an appropriate amount of parental discipline, while inviting the child's input into family decisions (Dusek, 1991; Elder, 1963; Bowerman & Bahr, 1973).

Peers. The discussion on adolescent development, decision-making skills, and influential factors continued with an inclusion of the peer group. It was recognized that there is a heightened conformity to peer group values during early to mid-adolescence, but that the influences of the adolescent peer group tend to be much more superficial and short-lived than parental influences (Dusek, 1991; Hillman, 1991; Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983; Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989). Indeed, adolescents tend to select peer groups based on individuals with characteristics much like their own, which may actually serve as reinforcement for parental values taught. Therefore, these two groups more often complement than conflict (Dusek, 1991).

Berndt (1979) explored this issue, as well. He studied 273 third through twelfth graders by presenting them with hypothetical dilemmas. These dilemmas required that the students choose between conforming to peer attitudes or parental attitudes on certain issues.

He found that third grade students often portrayed peers and parents in a contradictory light; these two influences were more aligned by grade six. More specifically, sixth

graders found that some issues, like politics and careers, required parental input; others, such as sexual behavior, were based primarily on the attitudes of the peer group. Ninth grade was noted as the level when peer influence was strongest, and parents and peers were again in opposition, as adolescents struggled for conformity within a social setting. Current research continued to support this belief that although peer influence increased during young adolescence, it does not permanently surpass the impact of parental influence (Dusek, 1991; Mann, Harmoni & Power, 1989).

The increased amount of time spent within peer groups generally serves a host of valuable purposes. Peer groups allow young adolescents to try a variety of roles without fear of failure (Dusek, 1991). They also allow contact with age mates who face similar concerns and decisions, likes and dislikes. They allow for the healthy development of age-appropriate skills, including cooperation and competition. Additionally, the heterosexual nature of the groups helps to prepare the developing adolescent for relationships that are common in the adult world (Dusek, 1991; Santrock, 1986).

There is a negative side to peer relationships, however, and this too must be noted if one is to fully review the spectrum of peer influence. Perhaps this negative side is best illustrated through the story of Za'ketha Blaylock (Gregory, 1992).

Za'kettha is 14 years old, intelligent, and a member of an inner-city black community. Her telephone rings constantly, but not as the result of popularity. Rather, the calls are threatening and terrifying. Za'kettha, like so many other bright minority children, faces ridicule and punishment from her black peers because of her educational aspirations.

Gregory (1992) found that "of all the obstacles to success...the most surprising --and discouraging-- can be those erected by...peers" (p. 64). She continued by adding that bright black students are humiliated for such things as speaking standard English, joining in activities aside from sports, and attending school regularly. Rather, the "right" attitude for them to take includes "...skipping class, talking slang, and 'being cool, carrying yourself like you don't care'" (pp. 64-65). Other middle grades children echo this list of criteria, noting that "Instead of trying to come up to the level of smart kids, they (other teenagers) try to bring you down to their level" (p. 65).

Gregory suggested that the problem has two stems: parents and school. In explanation, one mother noted, "We dropped the ball. Our generation failed to pass on the value of an education as a way of improving our plight" (p. 65). Additionally, Gregory added, "...even black teachers have lowered their expectations for many black students. As a result, they give them less attention and do not push them hard to do well" (p. 65).

Adolescent Social Decisions: Three Common Examples

One quickly begins to see that not only developmental influences, but also parents and peers must be considered if one is going to come to a deeper understanding of adolescent decision making. The Carnegie Council (1989) again provided the warning that "the economy will increasingly have little use for youth who are impaired by high-risk behaviors" (p. 27), reminding educators of the urgency of this situation.

In order to better grasp the types of high-risk behaviors currently exhibited by these youth, it is necessary to review three illustrations of poor decision-making skills. These examples include the use of alcohol and tobacco among teenagers, and their decisions involving sexual relationships.

Alcohol abuse. Declared "America's Drug of Choice" (Weiss, 1991), alcohol use, and abuse, among contemporary adolescents is on the rapid rise. One study (Van Hoose, 1986) reported in its findings that 75.3% of the male and 64.3% of the female eighth graders in this country have consumed alcoholic beverages, and that 24.7% of all eighth graders are problem drinkers. By the end of senior high school, over 90% have used alcohol.

Broken down even further, Weiss (1991) explained her "Drug of Choice" label with the following facts:

Over half of the nation's seventh through twelfth graders --10.6 million out of 20.7 million-- drink.

Eight million of these kids drink weekly, according to a recent government study; 5.4 million have had five or more drinks in a row at least once; half a million binge once a week.

Of the kids who drink, 3.3 million say they drink alone; 4.4 million drink when upset; 2.7 million drink when bored.

One of the greatest risk factors for becoming an alcoholic is to be the son, daughter, or sibling of one. Some researchers say children of alcoholics have four times the risk of alcoholism that children of non-alcoholics do.

Before turning 18, the average child will see 75,000 drinking scenes on television programs.

Alcohol-related traffic accidents killed 2,800 15-to-19-year-olds in 1989 (p. 4).

Very frightening indeed is the naivete with which these young adolescents consume alcohol. Research showed that 50% of the teenagers studied did not know that beer, their beverage of choice, was as intoxicating as liquor. In fact, many thought it impossible to get drunk on beer, even after consuming as many as seven in two hours. Further, 70% thought it possible to sober up with a cold shower or black coffee, no matter how drunk the person might be (Horton, 1985).

Why do teens drink? A former student cited peer acceptance:

Alcohol, I have had a run in with, but only a couple of times. I no longer have nothing more to do with alcohol. The reason I drank it before is because I was around my friends. I did not want to feel left out of not taking part in drinking.

--male, age 14, grade 8

Teachers commonly report that they are concerned with the personal decisions and habits that govern the social and emotional domain of the young adolescent, and thus the academic arena, as well. This frightening acceptance of alcohol use on a regular basis among teenagers has a serious effect on the classroom environment. Adolescents often boast of their weekend carousings, and many times they appear on the classroom doorstep exhausted and hung over.

Tobacco abuse. The increased use of tobacco products factors into this scenario, as well. Consider this story:

Three young girls sit happily smoking on a curb in Seattle, Washington. They are unconcerned, for they are deeply vested in the notion that they will probably live forever, and that such things as cancer and respiratory problems belong only to the aged. They are perhaps 14 or 15 years old, too young to drive and too young to legally buy tobacco products, yet they openly smoke undeterred. Fresh and healthy, they are smoking for the same reasons that many girls before them have taken up the habit: a search for sophistication, the quest for maturity, and the desire to appear older than they really are (Stripling, 1991).

Unfortunately, they are not alone. According to the U.S. Office on Smoking and Health, more than 3,000 children become smokers every day. In fact, 63.1% of all American high school seniors have tried smoking, and nearly one in five (18.5%) smoke daily (Christopher, 1992). Additionally, another 4% use

tobacco in other forms (Kirkby, 1991), including chewing tobacco, snuff, and other smokeless products.

Of particular interest was a study conducted by the West Virginia State Department of Education. When 4,230 randomly selected students were surveyed (grades 5-12), the following results were reported: About 16% admitted chewing tobacco. Additionally, 29% of males in grades 7 through 9, and 39% of males in grades 10 through 12 admitted that they were regular users. About 1% of the girls in each of the two groups stated that they had tried it. Further, the mean age for trying smokeless tobacco was 10 years, and more than half reported that they were regular users by age 11. School officials in West Virginia, and other states, reported that they were using pamphlets, presentations, suspensions, and even paddling to persuade their students to quit using these products (Formanek, 1992).

The advertising industry generally plays a negative role in this effort to encourage youngsters to break the tobacco habit. An illustration of this comes in the form of Old Joe, the camel who has been a long-standing symbol of Camel cigarettes. According to a study published in a special issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (Tomlinson, Ed., 1992, June), Old Joe was recognized by more children than adults and had led to a sharp increase in the use of this brand by teenagers. According to data referenced by the AMA, Old Joe has indeed influenced the smoking

behaviors of children; the number of smokers under age 18 who choose Camels has risen from 0.5% to 32.8%.

Unfortunately, the consequences of these decisions concerning tobacco products can be fatal. Kirkby (1991) highlighted the fact that the tobacco industry loses 375,000 domestic customers to smoking-related deaths each year. This statistical risk of dying has doubled in the past three decades for male smokers and quadrupled for female smokers.

Sexual participation. Teenage sexual experiences have become alarmingly commonplace, as well. Eight out of 10 males and 7 out of 10 females will have had sexual intercourse before leaving the teen years (Van Hoose, 1986).

Further, Adams and Fay (1984) reported that 54% of boys whom they surveyed and 27% of the teenaged girls reported that it was appropriate for a boy to hold a girl down and force her to have sex with him if she had "led him on." Likewise, it was determined in the same survey that 43% of the males and 12% of the females said it was okay if he had spent a great deal of money on her.

This casual approach to sex is echoed in a former student's recounting of a fairly familiar practice:

I used to sneak out to go meet my boyfriend every so often. I'd spend approximately 3 hours with him, then come home. I never got caught. Then when I was dating someone at this school I spent the night with his friend's sister and he spent the night with his friend, once on a Saturday night and on a school night. It's easy to do stuff like this when your parents trust you so much. I never once felt guilt because I never went

all the way with anyone. I still do these things depending on who I'm dating.

--female, age 14, grade 8

McCoy (1991) shared a tale that is commonplace among adolescents across our country. She retold this story of two teenagers: Sean and Melissa are outgoing and popular young adults who are dating, and who are swept away by the throes of first love. They arrive at Melissa's home after school, but before her parents' work day ends. They quickly, and regularly, head for her bedroom, where they engage in sexual intercourse.

By the time her parents arrive home, the two are bent over their homework at the kitchen table, holding hands and acting as her parents would expect two children to act when they are playing with "puppy love." Her mom and dad smile at each other, pleased that their daughter has found such a suitable young man to date.

McCoy (1991) continued by addressing the fact that this scene is by no means atypical. One young man concurred that no one he knows has ever had to have sex in a car because it is so easy right at home...there seems to always be ample opportunity.

One is again reminded of the Carnegie Council's contention (1989) that

while they become biologically mature at earlier ages, many young adolescents remain intellectually and emotionally immature. Thus, young people 10, 11, and 12

years old are able to, and do, make fateful choices involving their own sexuality that can affect their entire life course (p. 21).

One of the most frightening examples of these "fateful choices" is, of course, the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, which most commonly grows from the decision to become sexually active. A recent report ("Teen AIDS," 1992) stated that AIDS "is spreading unchecked" among the teenage population. It reported that the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families found that "the number of teens who have AIDS increased by more than 70% in the past two years" (p. A5). Further, they noted that

AIDS is the sixth-leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 24. Among teens ages 13 to 19, 401 AIDS cases were reported in 1989, compared with 789 in 1991 [Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta]. Among those ages 13 to 24, cases increased from 5,524 to 8,949 (p. A5).

Again the integrated effects of both adolescent development and social decision making come into play. The Carnegie Council (1983) shared focus for this thought, as well, by noting that

many problem behaviors of young adolescents appear to be interrelated. Young people who smoke and drink often experiment with illegal drugs and early, unprotected sex as well. These same young people are also prone to school failure. They are not merely exploring new behaviors, in short, but trying out lifestyles that become more entrenched as they grow older (p. 25).

Many children awaken to their adolescent years facing new and exciting opportunities. More often than not, however, they also find that temptations crowd their paths. These may include such things as: escalated periods of rapid physical development, the popularity of alcohol and tobacco use among both parents and friends, decisions concerning sexual participation, the increased pressure for peer conformity, changing family agendas...and always, a heightened sense of confusion over the complexities of it all.

These things often work together to distract the adolescent from the many opportunities offered within the middle grades classroom. Teachers have generally brought to their students traditional textbooks and teaching styles which are inappropriate for these changing adolescent lifestyles. Contemporary educators are now beginning to acknowledge that more relevant avenues must be opened to them. They are beginning to recognize the possibilities that exist when they focus curriculum on child-centered, experience-based modes of instruction, rather than the teacher-centered, assessment-based traditions of the past.

Appropriate Approaches to Middle Grades Curriculum

In order to better understand the ways in which a more innovative curriculum can meet the needs of the changing adolescent, it is necessary to briefly review a description of

both successful middle schools and the teachers who staff them. Because school, teachers, students, and curriculum are inextricably interwoven at the middle level, it is only with this descriptive foundation that one can begin to add color to the picture of the adolescent student.

Successful Schools

Because virtually all adolescents in this country are exposed to school, it has rapidly become an institution for socialization as well as academics. It is therefore a strong source of influence on the healthy development of the adolescent.

Children spend many years in schools as members of a small society in which there are tasks to be accomplished, people to be socialized with and to be socialized by, and rules that define and limit behavior, feelings, and attitudes. The experiences children have in this society are likely to have a strong influence in areas such as identity development, belief in one's competence, images of life and career possibilities, social relationships, standards of right and wrong, and conceptions of how a social setting beyond the family functions (Santrock, 1983, p. 311).

For the past two decades, policy makers, researchers, and teachers have been pushing, evaluating, and molding this complex environment to better fit the special needs of the developing young adolescent. Their efforts have been crystallized into what is known as the middle school movement (Lewis, 1991). Headed by the National Middle School Association (NMSA), it was founded on these beliefs:

1. The middle school is an educational response to the needs and characteristics of youngsters during the transition from childhood to full adolescence and, as such, deals with the full range of intellectual and developmental needs.
2. Young people going through the rapid growth and extensive maturation that occurs in early adolescence need an educational program that is distinctly different from either the elementary or the secondary model.
3. Existing programs for this age group have all too often lacked focus on young adolescent characteristics and needs.
4. Educators, school board members, parents, and citizens generally need to become more cognizant of this age group and what an effective educational program for this group requires.
5. No other age level is of more enduring importance because the determinants of one's behavior as an adult, self-concept, learning interests and skills, and values largely are formed in this period of life.
6. The developmental diversity of this age group makes it especially difficult to organize an educational program that adequately meets the needs of all.
7. The academic needs of middle school students are affected greatly by their physical, social, and emotional needs which also must be addressed directly in the school program (NMSA, 1992, p. 26).

Lipsitz (1984) added to this vision for effective middle level education, sharing a framework for identifying and observing successful middle grades schools:

1. They measure up to a set of "threshold" criteria related to safety, comportment, and achievement.
2. They respond appropriately to the developmental levels of students.
3. They pursue competence in learning.
4. They have won acceptance within the context of the local community and its expectations.
5. They function well in response to or despite unresolved national policy issues (p. 11).

Lipsitz (1984) spent an extensive amount of time in four successful middle schools which met these criteria. She noted characteristics that the four examples shared, which included:

1. Respect for, and cooperation from, students;
2. Recognition of the contributions of peer groups;
3. Appreciation for developmental diversities;
4. Sense of clarity about the purposes of intermediate schooling and the students who are affected by it;
5. Administrative vision for the school;
6. Maintenance of a positive climate; and
7. Regard for parental input.

Of special interest to Lipsitz was the teaching staff, and she described their contributions in this way:

It is very disquieting to visit successful schools. One would expect that it is difficult to be a good school and easy to be a bad school; but like superb musicians, the staff in good schools make their craft look easy. One has to struggle to remember vignettes from other schools, where everything seems very difficult (p. 169).

Successful Teachers

Many have studied the characteristics of these successful teachers who "make their craft look easy," and much has been written about them at the middle level (among others: Lounsbury, 1991a & 1991b; Lipsitz, 1984; McEwin & Thomason, 1989; Atwell, 1987; Arnold, 1987; Arnold, 1990; Merenbloom, 1988; Dusek, 1991). It was acknowledged that "...the single most important aspect of the school situation in terms of

influencing adolescent attitudes as well as success in school is the teacher" (Linney & Seidman, 1989 cited in Dusek, 1991).

McEwin & Thomason (1989) found that

...effective middle grades practitioners have two strengths acting in tandem. First, they have a thorough knowledge of the developmental nature of early adolescents. Second, they have subject matter and instructional expertise. With these strengths, teachers can give greater attention to professional decisions, can balance teacher-directed and student initiated learning and have far fewer disciplinary disruptions because of their classroom management skills. Greater opportunities to actually teach and learn result" (p. 10).

Arnold (1987) championed this professional by declaring that "innovative teaching is a rare and precious commodity," and "well conceived innovation illuminates our understanding of the teaching/learning process and raises our vision of the possible. For an untold number of teachers, it is the life blood that makes their work worthwhile" (p. 1).

Perhaps the most colorful description of the unique mindset of the middle school teacher comes from Lounsbury's (1991a) thoughts on "wayside teaching." He found that the very best part of the school day was often spent in the halls between classes, after school, or in dozens of other spots where brief encounters with children occur. He found that "one rarely becomes a 'significant other' on the basis of actions when formally instructing. It is in the relationships developed in wayside teaching that one is most likely to influence the lives of others" (p. 30). He cautioned that

"preparation of the heart as well as the mind has to precede it," for "the quality of the relationship preceding the conversation will reflect a bent of the heart and spirit that usually was a long time in the making" (p. 30).

It is this sense of celebration and uniqueness, this "bent of the heart and spirit," that leads the middle level teacher to a more innovative look at curriculum, and a more responsive reaction to the needs of these complex young adolescents.

Successful Curriculum

I remember:

10% of what I read

20% of what I hear

30% of what I see

50% of what I see and hear

70% of what I discuss with others

80% of what I experience by doing

95% of what I teach to others.

(Lounsbury, 1991b, p. 4)

Sitting at the back of the room, the observer watched as a group of 8th graders worked through the lengthy test that their teacher gave at the end of each unit. Having glanced furtively backward several times, one of the students finally turned to the observer and said, "This test is stupid."

The observer, supposing this was just another one of those notorious 8th grade behaviors, said nothing.

"This is stupid," the student protested again, this time in a louder voice.

Not wanting to create a scene, the observer whispered, "What's stupid?"

"This," said the student, pushing the test forward.

It was a test like other tests, several pages filled with multiple-choice, matching, and short-answer questions. So the observer said, "It doesn't look stupid. It just looks like the teacher is trying to find out whether you learned what you were supposed to."

"That's what's stupid about it. It's all what the teacher thinks we should know. Why don't they ever want to know what we know?" (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992, p. 81).

There is an old cartoon strip where Pogo, the central character, declared "We have met the enemy and he is us." Lounsbury (1991a) noted that few samplings of common wisdom have been repeated as often, perhaps, as this addition to our culture's folklore. Although he found great meaning in this small phrase, Lounsbury added that "while we may be the cause of most of our problems we are, at the same time, the real source of the solutions in almost all cases" (p. 33).

Middle level educators are beginning to recognize themselves first as the problem, and then as an interwoven part of the solution. This has, in turn, led many of these educators to search for a more relevant and child-centered curriculum. Their quest was born from the realization that much of the teaching which occurs in middle level schools today is simply not working. It fails to meet obvious adolescent needs, and it does not address societal demands. Further, it does little to prevent the decisions which result in the "high risk behaviors and intellectual unprepared(ness)" that the Carnegie Council has so clearly described.

The Realities of Middle School: One Example

A recent study of eighth graders in this country illustrated this gap between philosophy and implementation.

The National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 1988) actually conducted this investigation in three segments: The first phase described the experiences of eighth graders in this country in great detail (National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 [NELS:88]). The second and third waves of the study followed in two year intervals, and described the same class of students as tenth graders and then finally as high school seniors.

The objective was simple yet serious: "The longitudinal design of NELS:88 allows researchers to observe not only the critical transition of students from middle or junior high school to high school, but also to identify early student, school, and parental experiences that promote student learning" (p. ix). The study was designed to "take into consideration the much larger environment in which the student functions and develops. The study assumes that a student's eighth grade experiences are critical to the student's further social, emotional, and academic development" (p. ix). One of the major research questions which undergirds the study was identical to the question asked repeatedly by camps of middle level educators: "Under what circumstances do our children flourish and succeed?" (p. ix).

The National Middle School Association (1991) discussed this study and its major research question in terms of America's middle level schools. It noted that the average middle school attends poorly to the adolescent needs and

societal demands which have been previously described. Based on the results of the NELS:88 study, NMSA ("Change needed...", 1991) called for schools to become "communities of learning" if they are to indeed prove effective. It underscored the emphasis that must be placed on "...a climate that enhances intellectual development...(has) high expectations of students, challenge(s) them with an integrated curriculum, offer(s) meaningful relationships with adults, and maintain(s) an environment where students feel safe. Such communities are places where students take schooling seriously, where they are motivated and ready to learn, and where they are engaged in their schoolwork" (p. 8).

Unfortunately, the discussion continued, "...these learning communities are not found in most of our schools... The portrait painted by NELS:88 reveals the disparity between the schools we have and those we want for young adolescents" (p. 8). In outlining this belief, NMSA recognized three areas which it deemed vital to the successful schooling of developing young adolescents. It then counterpointed these areas with frightening pictures of reality, colored by the statistics offered from NELS:88. These three areas, and two examples each, include:

1. School Relationships:

An important characteristic of effective schools is that students have stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships with teachers and other school personnel. But the data shows that:

By spring of the school year, one-third of eighth-grade students said they had not talked with their teacher about coursework during the school year.

Two-thirds of the schools had departmentalized instruction, where students move throughout the day from class to class, teacher to teacher.

2. Students in Schools:

The model of an effective school assumes that students take school seriously and arrive prepared to learn. But according to NELS:88:

Nearly half of the students say they are bored at least half of the time they spend in school.

More than one-third of the students' parents have received a warning about their children's grades, and 22% have received a warning about the children's behavior.

3. School climate:

To be effective, schools need to provide an environment that engages students. While many students are disengaged, other students see the disruptions caused by their disengaged classmates as significant problems. The NELS:88 data shows that:

About 40% of eighth graders report class disruptions by other students often get in the way of their learning.

While most eighth-grade students feel safe at school many students report that physical conflicts, robbery or theft, vandalism of school property, alcohol, illegal drugs, and weapons are moderate to serious problems at their schools (p. 8).

The Realities of Middle Level Curriculum

Confronting these classrooms which are out of synchronization with adolescent needs is no small task, as Lipsitz (1984) noted: "Translating philosophy into curriculum is the most difficult feat for schools to accomplish. The translation to climate and organizational structure appears to be much easier for these (successful) schools than the translation of purpose into curriculum" (p. 188).

Confirming this thought, Beane (1991) added that middle level schools often strive to institute a listing of core features, such as interdisciplinary team organization, advisor-advisee programs, student activities, and block scheduling. They therefore effectively include many of the key components from the middle school agenda. However, he continued, "largely obscured in this search for improved middle level education... is... the most critical question... What should be the curriculum of the middle school?" (p. 5).

Beane (1991) took this issue to task with the observation that middle level schooling has indeed made great advances during the three decades since its inception; however, most of these advances focus on an understanding of early adolescents and organizational structures which are appropriate to their needs. The central question of curriculum has somehow received far less attention.

Merenbloom (1988) insisted on the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to learning. However, Beane (1991) noted that this is generally not achieved in today's middle schools, for teachers persist in identifying themselves by discipline orientation and their teaching follows fragmented suit. Middle level advocates proceed to champion an integrated approach to wholeness, yet they continue to witness a widening gap between philosophy and the realities of departmentalized curriculum implementation (Beane, 1991; Lounsbury, 1991b; Lipsitz; 1984; Stevenson, 1991; Toepfer,

1992; Capelluti & Brazee, 1992; the Carnegie Council, 1989; McDonough, 1991; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992; Arnold, 1991).

Unfortunately, the words "developmental responsiveness" have also all but become a cliché in both basal textbooks and teacher implementation of instruction. Schools may have well-designed mission statements but "practice amounts to little more than a few hands-on activities, an occasional field trip, a dash of Piagetian jargon, and business as usual" (Arnold, 1991, p. 10). In reality, "...American education has continued to give homage to a curriculum that was established in the last century under vastly different circumstances and for a markedly different clientele" (Lounsbury, 1991b, p. 3).

Experienced educators can easily cite many reasons for a curriculum that is relevant, innovative, and child-centered. Two illustrations which underscore this need were pulled from a society whose mixed messages are often ignored within the developmental considerations of the middle school curriculum.

The first illustration features adolescents who find it impossible to make societal contributions which will be recognized as useful or needed by the adults who surround them. Although opportunities may be out of the child's control due to age-related or financial limitations, the student still perceives the message as "I am not valuable. I have little or nothing to offer to the adult world."

A second illustration stems from the American advertising industry which goes to great lengths to portray youngsters who are physically, socially, and intellectually perfect in almost every way. To the developing adolescent, this message often causes a downward spiral in self-esteem. When middle school curriculums neglect these messages, many opportunities for rich and meaningful teaching are lost (Arnold, 1991).

Creating the Successful Curriculum

You may not divide the seamless cloak of learning. There is only one subject matter for education and that is Life in all its manifestations.

-- Alfred North Whitehead

The life which is unexamined is not worth living.

-- Plato

Education is something that I think is good in general, especially in America where people are guaranteed an education. It gives people who want to learn a chance.

I do, however, think that there are people who don't belong in the school system but are there anyway. There are teachers who don't like kids and kids who don't like learning. I love to learn if I am learning something that is interesting to me.

But the most interesting part of a class is the teacher. If a teacher isn't imaginative and doesn't make the class fun, then it does not matter what the subject is, the class is going to be boring.

-- a former student
male, age 14, grade 8

Arnold (1991) called for a middle level curriculum which is "rich in meaning." He explained that this approach to learning would embody three characteristics:

First, and quite obviously, (this curriculum) deals with material which is genuinely important and worth knowing....Second, meaningful curriculum deals effectively with values....Third, for curriculum to be rich in meaning, both its content and methodology must relate substantively to the needs and interests of young adolescents (pp. 8-10).

Likewise, Merenbloom (1988) called for "the creation and implementation of an interdisciplinary, thematic approach to learning," which is necessary if students see "the wholeness of learning, the interrelationships between subjects...and...the learning needs of the early adolescent learner" (p. 51).

Participants in the Middle Level Curriculum Project (McDonough, 1991) similarly defined successful approaches to learning. These participants summarized effective curriculum in terms that manifested the objectives of each individual member of the curriculum camp. This definition stated that an effective middle school curriculum was

that which encompasses the dynamic interaction of all experiences during the young adolescent's school day. This includes the instructional strategies, organizational arrangements, integrated curricular content, and cultural environment experienced by the young adolescent. This curriculum is not imposed on the student by the institution. Instead, young adolescents and members of the school community (students, teachers, parents, and community members) create curriculum in the process of seeking answers to questions and concerns in their search for self and social meanings (p. 29).

Organized in the spring of 1990, this group of teachers, administrators, state department personnel, and university

professors has pinpointed as its objective "...a middle level curriculum...which can and will meet young adolescents and their teachers where they are at any moment in their development. It will extend their world to encompass what lies beyond the school walls " (McDonough, 1991, p. 29). As if in summary, the Project's participants noted that this, "is a curriculum of and for the young adolescent, and it is a curriculum which embraces and addresses the social meanings sought by them and...members of the school community" (p. 29).

It is difficult to accomplish this goal of a curriculum which is "rich in meaning" and "worth living," a curriculum which is "something that is interesting to me" because it embodies "the wholeness of learning" and "encompasses the dynamic interaction of all experiences" (opening quotations). In order to meet this objective, the Project (McDonough, 1991) first identified a set of specific questions which focus on an effective and appropriate approach to learning. Included in this set of questions are the following:

1. Who are young adolescents?
2. What questions do they have about themselves and their world?
3. What questions does the world pose for them?
4. In what kind of future world might they live?
5. How can adults help all students learn?
6. What activities should young adolescents engage in at school?
7. How do we design a curriculum that is good both for young adolescents as well as for the adults who share this world?
8. In the school experience, how do we utilize all ways of knowing and all areas of human experience? (pp. 29-30).

Bringing these questions to task, the Project's participants set about making recommendations based on what is known about appropriate middle level education. The basic premise of this curriculum focuses on an adolescent's search for both self and social meaning, for this is essentially the most powerful concern of the emerging teenager.

The sources for this curriculum lie in the evolution of three types of questions. With explanations, these include:

1. Inquiries which young adolescents generally have about themselves, including self-concept and self-esteem, the future, and personal experiences with developmental changes;

2. Questions that they often ask about their own world, including generalities or particulars concerning: family units, peer relationships, cultures and societies, as well as the global community; and

3. Questions that are frequently not asked by early adolescents, yet which are important nonetheless, because they all live in a common world. For example, issues, problems, and concerns that are commonly confronted by all people because the world as a whole is interdependent: war and peace, human relations, school policies, environmental issues, prejudice, poverty, and others (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992, p.93).

The outcomes of this approach could be manifold, as was noted by curriculum reformers. For example, Glasser (1992) found that in the "Quality School" one never forgets

that people, not curriculum, are the desired outcomes of schooling. What we want to develop are students who have the skills to become active contributors to society, who are enthusiastic about what they have learned, and who are aware of how learning can be of use to them in the future (p. 694).

The Carnegie Council (1989) noted five characteristics which are associated with their vision of the healthy young adolescent. They described this child as one who is "...an intellectually reflective person; a person enroute to a lifetime of meaningful work; a good citizen; a caring and ethical individual; and a healthy person" (p. 15).

Perhaps these outcomes, and a plea to participate in their achievement, were best summarized for all in this way:

In the end, it is hard to believe that we would not support what these new curriculum visions offer to early adolescents. Here is the opportunity to help these students make closer connections with the world in which they live, to construct powerful meanings around their own concerns and those of the larger world, to integrate self and social interests, to gain a sense of personal and social efficacy, to experience learning as a whole and unified activity, to bring knowledge and skill to life in meaningful ways, and to have richer and fuller lives as early adolescents. Isn't this what we should all want for early adolescents and their middle schools?
(George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992, p. 103).

In essence, one must first consider the entire spectrum of the successful middle level curriculum, and then mentally connect it with students who "construct powerful meanings around their own concerns...integrat(ing) self...social interests" and any number of other developmental issues and

apprehensions. When one considers the classroom in light of adolescent concerns, a relevant reading curriculum factors out as a common denominator for students who are developmentally complex, socially unsure, and often academically ill-prepared.

Making Connections: Reading and the Successful Curriculum

The Commission on Reading's report (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, Eds., 1985), Becoming a Nation of Readers, underscored the fact that "reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school, and indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost" (p. 1).

Educators recognize the need to integrate classroom curriculum, adolescent concerns, and the developmental complexities that often promote poor decision-making habits. Reading can provide the catalyst by which this need can be met. In order to understand this more fully, a brief review of several considerations was necessary, including: reading instruction in successful schools as opposed to the realities of reading in our country, decision making and the reading curriculum, using realistic fiction with contemporary teens, and inviting reluctant students to read.

Reading Instruction in the Successful School

Glasser's (1992) vision of the successful student included the "skills to become an active contributor to society" (p. 674). The Carnegie Council (1989) clearly painted this young adult as one who is "...enroute to a lifetime of meaningful work" (p. 15). This adolescent is also described as one "who could bring knowledge and skill to life in meaningful ways...(thus having) richer and fuller lives" (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992, p. 103).

Lipsitz (1984) offered a portrait of the successful middle school in relationship to the curriculum and its outpouring of prosperous young adults. She found that "these schools are dramatic impresarios. What looks at first like spectacle is also solid curriculum and pedagogy that derives from a confident, often intuitive understanding of what playful, group-oriented, curious young adolescents need" (pp. 188-189).

Lipsitz (1984) noted that reading instruction is a key component in these successful middle level schools with their "solid curriculum and pedagogy." She spoke about reading at the middle level, for it is certainly important to the futures of the children whom these schools nurture. She observed, as well, that two of the four schools which she cited in Successful Schools for Young Adolescents had a specific time each day which was used for reading instruction.

She described an Author's Week at another school, where a crafter of adolescent novels appears annually to discuss reading and writing with the students. The children have invited many of their favorites, and past participants include such notables as Richard Peck, Avi, Paula Fox, M.E. Kerr, and Paula Danziger. She also cited the story of one principal who "burned a basal reader in front of the language arts department in order to communicate his desire for a diversified reading program" (p. 105). Clearly, reading instruction is a key ingredient in the analysis of a successful school's curriculum.

Reading in America: The Reality

Many other educators emphasized reading instruction, noting vocabulary, study skills, functional reading, and comprehension as primary components in every school's accounting (Merenbloom, 1988; Commission on Reading, 1985; NELS:88; Kozol, 1985; Atwell, 1987; Rudman, 1984; and many others). A number of these educators found, however, that this facet of successful curriculum development evidences wide gaps between philosophy and implementation.

The Carnegie Council (1989) charged every middle school in this country to beware the fact that the current job market demands much higher levels of literacy than schools are producing. NELS:88 found that overall, 14% of eighth graders scored below a basic level of proficiency in reading, 52%

scored competent at a basic level, and only 34% scored masterful at an advanced level. Kozol (1985) added color to this picture of reality by bluntly stating that

even if the economic situation is improved, and opportunities for jobs expand, (these) will not be jobs that can be filled by people who can read at less than ninth grade level. 'By the 1990's,' according to Dorothy Shields, education director at the AFL-CIO, 'anyone who doesn't have at least a twelfth grade reading, writing, and calculating level will be absolutely lost' " (p. 58).

It is imperative that relevant reading instruction be stressed within the middle school curriculum. It has become increasingly harder for young adolescents to meet the demands that are levied by a contemporary and highly technological society. Again the Carnegie Council's account leaps to mind, for they reported that "a recent National Assessment of Educational Programs found that only 11% of 13-year-olds were 'adept' readers, that is, able to understand relatively complicated written information" (p. 27). This leaves behind an alarming 89% who scored somewhere below this "adept" level of literacy.

Kozol (1985) continued to darken the picture by including the daily routines that often comprise one's happiness:

Twenty-five million American adults cannot read the poison warnings on a can of pesticide, a letter from their child's teacher, or the front page of a daily paper. An additional 35 million read only at a level which is less than equal to the full survival needs of our society.

Fifteen percent of recent graduates of urban high schools read at less than grade level. One million

teenage children between twelve and seventeen cannot read above the third grade level. Eighty-five percent of juveniles who come before the courts are functionally illiterate. Half the heads of households classified below the poverty line by federal standards cannot read an eighth grade book. Over one third of mothers who receive support from welfare are functionally illiterate. Of 8 million unemployed adults, 4 to 6 million lack the skills to be retrained for hi-tech jobs (pp. 4-5).

Again the Carnegie Council (1989) illustrated the future of the young adolescent, as it continued Kozol's description:

The economy will increasingly have little use for youth who are impaired by high-risk behaviors or who are intellectually unprepared for the challenges of a changing economy. Job growth is concentrated in occupations that require much more than basic literacy....The domestic job market today reflects the intense international competition in which the United States finds itself. This nation needs a workforce capable of critical thinking and creative problem-solving. Yet we continue to educate youth for the smokestack economy of generations past.

As a nation, therefore, we face a paradox of our own making. We have created an economy that seeks literate, technically trained, and committed workers, while simultaneously we produce many young men and women who are semi-literate or functionally illiterate, unable to think critically and untrained in technical skills, hampered by high-risk lifestyles, and alienated from the social mainstream (pp. 27-28).

Decision Making and the Reading Curriculum

One is again reminded of the poor social decisions that today's young adolescents so frequently make. The implications are clear, for it is often this immature decision making which results in the exhibition of "high-risk behaviors...and intellectual unprepared(ness)" that both Kozol and the Carnegie Council so aptly described.

Wales, Nardi, and Stager (1986) called for an inclusion of decision-making skills and relevant curriculum, and they guaranteed that the resulting lifestyle would involve a brighter focus for American youth. They reminded us that

decision makers play the roles of philosopher, scientist, designer, and builder. Schooling focused on decision making and critical thinking skills that serve it, and the knowledge base that supports it, will allow students to learn these roles, to claim their capacity to think and their heritage as human beings (p. 41).

Most educators would agree that decision-making skills should be included in the adolescent curriculum, yet they would also acknowledge that, in reality, this is a topic which is rarely addressed. Ross (1981) determined that these skills are confronted so sporadically that there is little evidence of growth in ability, grades 7 through 10. Like Ross, many researchers expressed the concern that appropriate skills must become an intrinsic part of the adolescent classroom (Duryea, 1986; Nelson, 1985; Carnegie Council, 1989; Hammes & Duryea, 1986; Mann, Harmoni & Power, 1989).

"Learning social decision making and problem solving is a developmental right of all children; systematic instruction in those skills...is of equal relevance to children's future in a social world as is instruction in 'traditional' academic skills" (Elias & Tobias, 1990). Scales (1990) agreed, and suggested that such decisions as those which result in pregnancy, dropout rates, and drug abuse could perhaps be

modified if focus were placed more on the developmental needs of the emerging adolescent. He felt that helping adolescents obtain affirmative answers to the questions, "Am I competent? Am I normal? Am I lovable and loving?" could yield young adults who choose healthier, more productive lifestyles.

Hammes & Duryea (1986) discussed the results from a study which they conducted with 94 eighth through eleventh grade students in New Mexico and Montana. Based on their survey, they found that abstract thinkers seemed to fare better in typical adolescent decision-making situations. The study found that

adolescents usually experience high levels of anxiety and uncertainty because most of their health decisions are made in the context of emotional stress, such as smoking, drinking, and sex. Therefore, the argument could be proposed that if adolescents have not been taught decision-making skills, such as resistance to persuasion skills and decision-making steps, or they have not developed abstract thought processes, they would be ill-equipped to make informed health-related choices (p.225).

The Carnegie Council warned that America will have little use for the young adults who fit this "ill-equipped" description. Kozol painted a bleak picture of the illiterate adolescent's future. Curriculum advocates insist on a reformation to the realities that exist within classrooms.

It would seem that these three concerns could be merged in any middle school setting. The social world portrayed within the covers of an adolescent novel could provide the child with a backdrop which would readily lend itself to the

safer exploration of any number of social decisions. In doing so this curriculum would reap three benefits. It would meet the demands for a more student-centered classroom, it would cultivate literacy development in the adolescent, and it would empower the emerging adult. Rudman (1984) added her agreement to this thought:

The current emphasis in education is on basic skills, individualized instruction and problem solving. The structure of the conventional classroom has changed and continues to change. Means are being sought to enable children to maintain and improve their decision-making and evaluative skills. Students are being encouraged to explore their environment and to extract from it that which is meaningful to them. Reading, one of the most important areas of instruction in the schools, has emerged as a critical tool for the development of the skills of independent and responsible critical thinking and behavior (p. 2).

Realistic Fiction and Young Adults

Realistic fiction introduces the young adolescent to both enhanced social decision making and the lure of relevant print. It is consuming and empowering. Within the pages of a contemporary novel the student finds a world that provides room and board to other young adolescents who face similar problems and who must also make stressful decisions. In realistic fiction, the student meets characters who also face escalated periods of personal development, the popularity of alcohol and tobacco use among parents and friends, decisions concerning sexual participation, the increased pressure for

peer conformity, changing family agendas... And always, a heightened sense of confusion over the complexities of it all.

Abrahamson (cited in Holbrook, 1982) found that teenagers undertake eight developmental tasks as they undergo the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, and he noted that these eight tasks are clearly marked by adolescent literary characters, as well. The implication for strong classroom connections becomes clear. Included in this list of adolescent developmental tasks are the following:

1. Discovering sex roles in cultural settings;
2. Developing relationships with peers;
3. Achieving relationships with the opposite sex;
4. Accepting the physical body;
5. Changing parental relationships;
6. Forming value patterns;
7. Making vocational decisions; and
8. Working for pay (p. 380).

Abrahamson (cited in Holbrook, 1982) also noted the prominence of a ninth task in recent literature, this being the exposure to and acceptance of death. Of this addition, Holbrook (1982) explained that "many of these topics may seem morbid, even unhealthy for impressionable teenagers, but few of them are beyond the realm of adolescent experience or at least consciousness" (p. 380).

Inviting Middle School Students to Read

Middle school students are often reluctant readers, and realistic fiction offers a solution to this situation. Donelson and Nilsen (1989) discussed five reasons why the reluctant reader would turn to young adult fiction. Included in these reasons are the following:

1. This genre is written specifically for teenagers and therefore is geared to their age level and interests.
2. It features their language.
3. It is generally shorter and more simply written than adult books. Too, it does not look like a textbook.
4. The stories tend to be dramatic and well-written.
5. There is a wide selection, with almost 800 new books published each year.

Issacs (1992) suggested that middle school teachers would do well to pay careful attention to the titles and authors which their students select, and to use some of their choices in the classroom's reading curriculum. She explained that "Peer relationships are vitally important in the middle school years and these students, like any middle school students, depend much more on each other than on adults for reading recommendations" (p. 139).

Clary (1991) suggested six additional strategies that can lead to an increased interest in reading:

1. Capitalize on interests;
2. Assure easy access to relevant reading materials;

3. Nurture a conducive environment;
4. Allow reading time during the school day;
5. Note the importance of adult models; and
6. Employ motivational strategies such as schoolwide contests and booktalks (p.340).

Sanacore (1992) added the importance of "classroom clutter" such as magazines and newspapers, and emphasizing reading as a yearlong, and thus lifelong, habit. Frew (1990) provided similar emphasis, suggesting that students should be allowed to freely talk, share, and respond to what they have read. Atwell (1987) echoed this, and both Frew and Atwell perceived reading aloud to students as an invaluable practice.

Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, Eds., 1985) offered suggestions that are relevant to the problem of classroom curriculum in response to Kozol's description and The Council's charge. It recommended that:

1. Teachers must create a classroom environment that is literate, stimulating, and well-disciplined, with "an adequate amount of time allocated to reading and writing."

2. Teachers must fully attend to comprehension instruction in the classroom.

3. The use of workbooks and skills sheets should be closely monitored. They monopolize time in the classroom, "despite the fact that there is little evidence that these activities are related to reading achievement."

4. Independent reading, both at school and outside of the classroom should be promoted. It is directly correlated with an increase in reading achievement.

5. Children should be offered frequent opportunities to write, for this too impacts reading ability.

6. Schools should cultivate a reading atmosphere that permeates everything.

7. The school library should be recognized as a key component in this "becoming a nation of readers." Libraries should therefore be well-stocked and appropriately staffed (pp. 117-120).

Both the invitation to read and the call to examine characters under safe conditions must be recognized and addressed by the middle level educator. The Carnegie Council (1989) warned that young adolescents "with minimal competencies will barely get by. The most poorly prepared will move in and out of crime, drug abuse, or alcoholism" (p. 29). The Council's charge is clear. The invitation must be successfully issued, and it must be shared across a network of both cognizant teachers and secure young adults.

The Commission on Reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, Eds., 1985) stated that "the knowledge is now available to make worthwhile improvements in reading throughout the United States. If the practices seen in the classrooms of the best teachers in the best schools could be

introduced everywhere, improvements in reading would be dramatic" (cover). The best classrooms at the middle level are those where instruction is relevant, child-centered, and integrated. Reading realistic fiction with students gives teachers an opportunity to initiate the "practices seen in the classrooms of the best teachers" while offering these complex young adolescents an opportunity to safely discover the habits associated with healthy decision making.

Summary

"In a real sense, student development during early adolescence is hard to capture in generalities; these students are often described as having little in common but the fact of changing development itself" (George, 1991, p. 4). Facing significant turning points and an overlay of heavy societal demands, both young adolescents and their teachers often find these years to be difficult indeed. It does seem that adolescents often have little in common-- with each other or the adults who surround them. Their patterns of growth are diverse and complex, their mood swings are incredible, their confusions are real. They turn to both schools and parents for guidance; however, they often find these havens void of understanding and concern, for these adults are struggling with their own changing roles and identities.

From this image of contemporary youth emerges the shrouded figure of the young adolescent who is ill-prepared to confront the situations and dilemmas of a changing body and a changing world. Current efforts to teach this child in traditional ways have clearly failed. Instead of celebrating an adolescent who is fluent and articulate, we see one who is functionally illiterate by society's standards. Instead of the healthy rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, we see the student who approaches life from an attitude of indecision and peer group conformity.

Early adolescence for these youth is a turning point towards a diminished future. Many will live outside or on the fringes of those communities that produce the achievers and the leaders in this society. A substantial number will grow into adults who are...the unhealthy, the addicted, the criminal, the violent, and the chronically poor. These are the youth left behind (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 20).

Our challenge is clear, and it is a difficult one. In order to nurture healthy young adolescents, we must find a catalyst that will enhance their social decision-making skills while assuring them of the literacy levels required to meet the demands of a changing world.

In Response to the Challenge

This study clearly addressed this challenge. It recognized the consequences which face young adolescents who exhibit both poor decision-making skills and a lack of concern

for the demands of a more literate work force. In doing so, this study explored the dynamics of this challenge in one particular classroom of seventh grade reading students.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, the researcher designed a curriculum which invited these students into the world of realistic fiction. Activities provided a format for describing both their decision-making agendas and their reactions to reading as valuable, relevant, and influential. In this curriculum, they were introduced to a host of literary peers who live under the same conditions, and who are immersed in the same developmental diversities and social decision-making situations as they.

Three Issues Emerged

An in-depth review of the research concerning adolescent development, decision making, and the integration of realistic fiction into the middle grades curriculum yielded three major areas of concern:

1. The need to further explore Harren's notion (cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983) that young adolescents are developmentally capable of implementing a structured approach to decision making;

2. The need to investigate realistic fiction as a possible foundation to reading within the middle grades curriculum. This stemmed from the thought that realistic fiction could provide a curriculum which is "rich in meaning,"

literacy-based, relevant, and impacting on the decision-making agendas of early adolescents. Therefore, its potential is both expansive and enduring; and

3. The need to approach both a systematic decision-making model and reading in ways that encourage their transfer from classroom to private life.

Through both the individual students and their literary peer groups, this study proceeded to explore these three issues.

Developing a Successful Curriculum for This Study

This researcher therefore turned to the dual task of answering the study's research questions while addressing these critical issues. The classroom curriculum emerged as the obvious vehicle for accomplishing this two-fold task.

Before the Study Begins

Book selection. Prior groundwork had been laid over the past few years, as the researcher immersed herself in the reading of approximately 200 contemporary and realistic young adult novels. She selected this particular genre because it portrays a world which is identical to the one in which today's adolescent lives. The researcher chose 31 titles from among this list of more than 200.

Selection criteria was provided largely by both Rudman (1984) and Abrahamson (cited in Holbrook, 1982). Summarized,

these criteria stressed the importance of mirroring the child's development and presenting selections which are relevant, interesting, and realistic. The researcher also considered criteria which was specific to this group of seventh graders. For example, she included young adult authors who were popular with these students, a similar number of male and female characters, multicultural backgrounds as found within this particular classroom, and social concerns which were common to this group of students. Finally, and in accordance with the study's purpose, she placed emphasis on selecting books which featured good and poor decision making.

Mrs. Timmons, the students' reading teacher, approved the final list. The researcher then presented it in two parent meetings and it was approved in each. Copies of the list were also shared with the system's superintendent and the school's principal and librarian. All feedback was positive and supportive. (See Appendix K, Attachment 3 for an annotated listing of these books.)

The DECIDE model. Once the book selection had been finalized, attention was again turned to Harren's belief that young adolescents are developmentally capable of implementing a structured approach to decision making. This led the researcher to review systematic approaches which were developmentally appropriate for implementation in a seventh grade classroom.

She selected the DECIDE model (Durrant, Frey, & Newbury, 1991) because it featured a simple acronym and was easy to memorize, thus enhancing the probability that it would become intrinsic to the study's participants. The curriculum nurtured an understanding of this model as it applied first to the book selections and then to the students' personal lives. (See Appendix G for a copy of this model.)

Curriculum addressed. Once the researcher had selected both the novels and a decision-making model, the question of daily curriculum was addressed. The North Carolina Competency-Based Curriculum guide (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1985) was reviewed for grade 7, Communication Skills. This guide stressed that

the ability to communicate effectively is essential for successful participation in our rapidly changing world. The communication skills--listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing--are the means by which an individual establishes satisfactory relationships within our highly complex environment, for they enhance the quality of life and promote respect for human dignity. In addition, they enable decisions to be made with precision and promptness. These skills involve thinking processes that are learned and applied as an integrated part of a whole world of experiences available to every learner. Effective communication is dependent upon three important factors: the background of experiences the learner brings to a communication situation, the developmental stage of the learner, and the learner's sense of personal worth (p. 261).

This pulled back into play the research on successful middle grades curriculum, which called for "the creation and implementation of an interdisciplinary, thematic approach to

learning" where children are encouraged to see "the wholeness of learning, the interrelationships between subject areas and...the learning needs of the early adolescent learner" (Merenbloom, 1988, p. 51). Like state guidelines, these middle grades advocates called for a curriculum which is "rich in meaning," relevant, literacy-based, and impacting on the choices which early adolescents make. Additionally, George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane (1992) suggested three types of general questions as appropriate catapults into effective curriculum development. Specific consideration was given to these questions. They include:

1. Inquiries which young adolescents have about themselves (for example, self-esteem and personal development);

2. Questions which they frequently ask about their world (for example, family units, peer relationships, and cultural differences); and,

3. Questions which are not often asked by early adolescents, yet which are important nonetheless (for example, human relationships and prejudices).

Therefore, both the state curriculum guide and the national movement for improved middle grades instruction placed primary emphasis on the integration of classroom and life, including the development of healthy decision-making skills. The researcher used these mandates as a framework for successful curriculum design. Emphasis was placed on keeping

each day's instruction interesting and relevant, with the DECIDE Model supplying a common point of focus for each of the 31 novels. General structure was furnished by the study's four research questions, which were sequentially interspersed throughout the eight week course.

The Study Begins

The researcher established the order of presentation for the 31 novels first. The most sensitive arrangement supported a gradual move into books that were of a more serious nature, and then back again into a lighter look at life before the closing days of the study. Vocabulary was highlighted when necessary, comprehension questions were finalized, and any skills that Mrs. Timmons deemed appropriate were incorporated into each novel's curriculum.

The researcher also reviewed the study's four research questions. She decided that each should be directly confronted by one of the four formal writing assignments, as well as through journal entries, class discussions, and other less direct addresses. (See Appendix H for the four writing assignments, and Appendix K for the daily agenda.)

The first novel. The first selection, Who Invited the Undertaker? (Ruckman, 1989), was read aloud to the entire class by the researcher. This story highlights Dale, a middle school student who handles the stresses of adolescence in an entertaining and comical style.

This book tapped the students' interests, allowed them to adjust to the researcher's teaching style, and provided a brief exploration of planned decision making through the DECIDE model. This was all accomplished by the researcher reading and informally discussing the novel with the students, who were often seated in the floor, and who were encouraged to speak out in a conversational tone when comments and questions arose. (Students could volunteer to read portions aloud to the class; however, they were required to ask one day ahead and then review the pages for homework. This ensured that they would feel comfortable with the oral reading process.)

Each day's reading began with the introduction of a minimum number of appropriate vocabulary words; emphasis was placed on synonyms and short word meanings rather than on dictionary definitions. Occasional comprehension checks were done, but again, questions featured a transition between the story and the students' lives. Examples from the final test include:

Do you ever listen to country music? What are the lyrics often about? What kind of clues do these give you as to the character of Dale's mom?

and

Dale ends his story with these thoughts:

Now pumped up by all the good feelings, he was ready to face facts: a) Stuff happens to people; b) things change; and c) chances are, if you trust and help each other, you'll be happy again. The three steps were part of the last essay he wrote for English-- "The ABC's of Survival"-- one of a

half dozen that ended up in the north hall display case (p. 185).

Please detail an incident in your life when you came to realize the same things as Dale: That stuff happens which causes things to change, whether you want them to or not. If you accept the change and learn to trust and help one another through it, however, things will turn out OK, and you'll be able to find happiness again.

- A. What was the change which occurred?
- B. How did you work through accepting it?
- C. What advice could you offer another teenager who is facing the same situation?

The first formal writing assignment was also completed during this time.

The second novel. On My Honor (Bauer, 1986) was selected to follow the Ruckman novel because it provided progression into a more somber look at the types of decisions that young adolescents make. The book lent itself well to the DECIDE model for decision making, while still underscoring the fact that we all approach choices from different perspectives, and must therefore individually account for consequences.

The two young men featured in On My Honor disobey a family rule and swim in an unpredictable river. One drowns as a result, and the other is too terrified to report the accident to either his parents or the police.

Like the first book, On My Honor was read and discussed aloud in an informal style. Unlike the introductory novel, however, less emphasis was given to the generalities of classroom curriculum, and more was placed on the decision-making process. This was possible, in part, because the book

is short (90 pages) and of a lower reading level (RL 5.3). Therefore, less time was needed for clarification of vocabulary and general text meaning. This declining emphasis on plot particulars was deliberate. It moved students away from an accent on trivial details and into the broader arena of reading as a fast-paced, relevant, and interesting habit with philosophies and situations drawn directly from the commonalities of life.

The introductory discussion featured the fact that On My Honor is a Newbery Honor Book, an accolade that students should note when making future library selections. The book was then read aloud, with appropriate discussion introduced at designated times. For example:

CHAPTER TEN:

page 72: Note that Tony's parents, as well as Joel's, must bear the consequences of Tony's decision. Did Tony consider that? Ask two or three students to share times when they have either left someone else to bear the consequences for their actions, or when they have been left with someone else's poor decision. Now ask them to note those people who are suffering because of Joel's decision to keep Tony's death, and the circumstances surrounding it, a secret.

Students were also encouraged to add their questions and comments to the researcher-generated discussion.

The students completed the second formal writing assignment during the reading of this novel, and they started daily reading response journals. Through these writings, the students were encouraged to begin sharing critical assessments

of this book's characters as research question two became fine-tuned. (See Appendix E for reading response journals and Appendix K, Attachment 4 for the full curriculum for On My Honor.)

The third novel. The researcher then presented seven novels through booktalks, and each student selected one that held particular appeal. These seven titles included:

Second Star to the Right by Deborah Hautzig (1981)
Slake's Limbo by Felice Holman (1974)
The Divorce Express by Paula Danziger (1982)
Bathing Ugly by Rebecca Busselle (1988)
The Boy Who Drank Too Much by Shep Greene (1979)
Hatchet by Gary Paulsen (1987)
I Know What You Did Last Summer by Lois Duncan (1973)

Once selections had been made, the students who held the same titles clustered together to form sub-groups of four students each. Each of these seven titles followed the earlier pattern of moving the students into more sensitive social situations, influential factors, and the consequences of bad planning.

Each group was left to independently decide upon an approach to the actual reading of the novel. Most groups chose to sit outdoors in a relaxed fashion and to combine both oral and silent reading. The DECIDE model continued to provide a framework for discussion, as the characters' decision-making habits were compared to the students' own.

Working in collaborative peer groups moved the students from an adult-directed atmosphere into one where private

interactions among friends were nurtured. This provided a sense of mature team structure while encouraging individuality within a friendship circle. A comfortable and successful transition was ensured by the researcher, as she moved among the groups each day, discussing, listening, and sharing.

A formal protocol for group discussion culminated the reading process. The first half of this assignment required an individual overview of the novel read, and the second half brought each group together again for a comparative discussion of ideas. Again, emphasis was placed on interpretations that were comprehension-oriented, "rich in meaning," relevant, literacy-based, and impacting on the choices made by each student. For example:

Write a brief sketch of the main character. Add a second paragraph in which you compare and contrast this person to yourself.

Describe a situation in which the main character had to make a difficult decision (one which you personally deem important or hard). What did s/he do? What would you have done in this same situation? How would you have arrived at your decision?

(See Appendix F for a full copy of this protocol.)

The third writing assignment was also completed at the close of this novel.

The fourth novel. The researcher then added two titles to the initial seven presented for group reading, and the students selected a fourth novel from this total of nine. Students were encouraged to read this selection alone. This

pulled them further into an introspective review of personal decision-making habits; thus, each student was encouraged to also grow individually.

As in the preceding booklist, these two books carried the students deeper into the world of social decisions with serious ramifications. Are You in the House Alone? (Peck, 1976) deals with acquaintance rape, and The Language of Goldfish (Oneal, 1980) portrays a young girl who is unable to handle the confusing changes that are happening within her developing body.

A great deal of reflection was evidenced in each student's private reading response journal. However, the group protocol was again utilized for peer discussion. This pulling back into groups allowed the students to assert personal opinions within a peer setting, thus encouraging a comfortable atmosphere for both agreement and disagreement as to individual decision-making agendas.

The fifth novel. The final novel was Paulsen's The Boy Who Owned the School (1990), and the researcher read it aloud in a whole-class setting. Like the introductory Who Invited the Undertaker?, this book was a whimsical look at life through the eyes of an emerging adolescent. It served a dual purpose: It lightened the mood before the study's close, and it provided an obvious review of decision making.

A sixth novel. A minimum of one additional title was read outside of the classroom setting. Nineteen novels had

been booktalked earlier in the eight-week study, and student selections were made from these, including three books which had been audio-taped. Conversations concerning these books were conducted through the reading response journals, and extra credit was given for all books read beyond the required single title. (See Appendix K: Attachment 3 provides annotations of these titles, and Attachment 5 lists the extra credit requirements.)

The Study Concludes

Focus returned to the students' individual decision-making styles; of particular interest was the possible influence that literature had had on them, present and future. The students completed a fourth writing assignment based on their current perceptions and decision-making agendas.

The researcher and participants discussed summer reading. Students had been given annotations of all books as the study progressed through the various rounds of reading, and these were organized at this time. As is the researcher's classroom custom, each student was required to submit an evaluation of the study. This included a numerical grade based on concept, titles selected, and classroom implementation of curriculum.

This Curriculum: A Review

It was the researcher's intent that this eight-week study adhere to both the North Carolina Competency-Based Curriculum

guide (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1985) and the key components of successful middle level instruction as prescribed by such educators as Lipsitz (1984), Lounsbury (1991), Atwell (1987), Arnold (1987, 1990, & 1991), Merenbloom (1988), the Carnegie Council (1989), Beane (1991), McDonough (1991), and others.

In keeping with this intent, these considerations were given primary emphasis:

1. Diverse levels of student development were respected (for example: maturity and interest levels, and reading and writing abilities).

2. Good communication skills were stressed at all times: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing.

3. Both academic achievement and personal engagement with the learning process were emphasized.

4. Skills sheets, workbooks, and rote application of teacher's manuals were all avoided.

5. Motivational strategies were kept at a premium (for example: booktalks, group work, unstructured class discussions, and enthusiasm).

6. Basal textbooks were abandoned for the more natural language and relevant situations common to tradebooks.

7. Diverse characteristics of developing adolescents were replicated by characters within the book selections; therefore, an enhanced understanding of self was nurtured within each student.

8. Reading was accomplished in a variety of ways so as to strengthen basic skills: oral reading by an instructor and student volunteers, group reading both aloud and silently, and independent reading outside of the classroom.

9. Cultural differences were noted within the novels. These differences were then correlated to the students' own lives, promoting a respect for and tolerance of the individualities of others.

10. Relevant decision-making situations were portrayed in each of the tradebooks read. The DECIDE model, an example of a planned approach, was used as the key for examination because it could be easily understood by the diversified levels found within this classroom. The model was applied often to the literature, ensuring comprehension. Only then could it be transferred into the lives of the individual students.

11. The library was utilized and promoted (both school and city).

12. Parents were interested and involved.

13. Finally, the Carnegie Council's (1989) vision of the healthy young adolescent was associated with all aspects of the learning process. This child was noted as one who is "...an intellectually reflective person, a person enroute to a lifetime of meaningful work, a good citizen, a caring and ethical individual, and a healthy person" (p. 15).

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

In these changed times, when young people face unprecedented choices and pressures, all too often the guidance they needed as children and need no less as adolescents is withdrawn. Freed from the dependency of childhood, but not yet able to find their own path to adulthood, many young people feel a desperate sense of isolation. Surrounded only by their equally confused peers, too many make poor decisions with harmful or lethal consequences.

Middle grade schools -- junior high, intermediate, and middle schools -- are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift, and help every young person thrive during early adolescence. Yet all too often these schools exacerbate the problems of young adolescents.

A volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools and the intellectual and emotional needs of young adolescents. Caught in a vortex of changing demands, the engagement of many youth in learning diminishes, and their rates of alienation, substance abuse, absenteeism, and dropping out of school begin to rise.

As the number of youth left behind grows, and opportunities in the economy for poorly educated workers diminish, we face the specter of a divided society: one affluent and well-educated, the other poorer and ill-educated. We face an America at odds with itself.

--The Carnegie Council
on Adolescent Development
Turning Points 1989 (pp. 8-9)

This dissertation study probed a portion of this dilemma, as it discussed a portion of these "poor decisions (which result in) ...harmful or lethal consequences." It then took this examination further, for its purpose was to describe how

a literature-based curriculum enhanced these social decisions that middle grades students may make. In doing so, it:

1. Contributed to the need for a child-centered curriculum which is developmentally appropriate and student responsive;

2. Enhanced literacy development by immersing the student in relevant print through a loosely structured curriculum which allowed for researcher-teacher-student-peer feedback, and other communications components; and

3. Instilled in students a sense of appropriate empowerment and control over their personal decision-making agendas.

This study generated a thick description of the adolescent in terms of common concerns and decisions faced, where s/he turns for guidance in making these decisions, and the degree of satisfaction that the student feels with the majority of the decisions that s/he makes and executes. Focus rested primarily on the effects that literary role models may have on this decision-making procedure. In order to accomplish this, the depth of descriptive detail found in qualitative research methodology was employed.

An Overview of Qualitative Research Methodology

Rogers (1984) shared a story that is of significance to those who teach, and which underscores the merits of using a

qualitative approach in the educational setting. He told of Paulo Freire, a man who was charged with teaching a portion of Brazil's illiterate adult population to read. Freire set about his task eagerly, but soon reached a high level of frustration. He found that he could not accomplish his assignment without first understanding the hidden agendas and realities of his students' lives. As a result, he changed his focus, exploring instead these people and what they were really about. Only then could he successfully teach them.

Qualitative research methodology involves this business of probing beneath the obvious, of coming to terms with the hidden agendas that others bring into our experiences, concerns, and curiosities. It involves a level of understanding that is achieved primarily through observation of a person in her/his natural setting.

Rogers identified the heart of the qualitative, or naturalistic, approach as "this belief that nothing is necessarily as it appears to be" (p. 85). Rist (1975) defined it as the direct observation of events and interactions in an ongoing and naturalistic fashion. Rogers (1984) summarized the common beliefs of qualitative researchers as:

1. The acceptance of complexities;
2. The acknowledgement of the need for intensive study of the phenomenon over a long period of time;
3. The belief that people and institutions must be studied holistically, and not apart from influencing factors;

4. The conviction that people are not always as they seem to be on the surface, thus requiring direct site, face to face observation and interaction;

5. The understanding of attitudes, values, beliefs, and underlying assumptions which together comprise the individual(s) studied;

6. The thick description which emerges from a stronger interest in process than in product;

7. The belief that description includes everything involved in the context as it is, without manipulation;

8. The initiation of the study without firm decisions as to instrument selection and itinerary; allowing these things to emerge as the study progresses; and

9. The recognition of generalizable theory as something that emerges from the multiple realities of the study. (Often researchers limit the direction that a study may take by dictating to it based on personal values and beliefs. In qualitative research, however, the theory is allowed to emerge, and it therefore actually contributes to the development of new theory; it is known as "grounded theory" because it rises from the data itself, and is in turn proved by it.) (pp.86-88).

Case Study Methodology

Rogers (1984) advised that the best way to accomplish all of this is to "look at what we ordinarily take for granted

with fresh eyes; to see events, with all of their subtleties and nuances, as they really are" (p. 8). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that "...for naturalistic inquirers, the reporting mode of choice is the case study..." (p. 357). When combined with suggestions from Rogers (1984), it becomes clear that case study reporting is indeed one way to study better, with fresh eyes, things that are often taken for granted.

Though mentioned widely in the research literature, Lincoln and Guba (1981 & 1985) noted that there seems to be little agreement as to a definition of the term "case study." They suggested that it is "a snapshot of reality, a slice of life, or an episode" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, pp. 370-371) or perhaps a "depth examination of an instance" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 360). Stake (1991) explained it as an "...inquiry about a particular object rather than...a population of objects or...relationships among variables that describe objects. (It) may contribute to generalization but is an exercise in particularization" (p. 76).

In order to facilitate this "snapshot of reality," the case study relies on such methodology as observations, examination of documents and records, interviews, investigative journalism, and unobtrusive measures. The report which results is complex, holistic, and narrative. Voice is supplied through verbatim quotations, allusions, metaphors, and illustrations (Sadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991).

Advantages of Case Study Reporting

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted several advantages and purposes to case study reporting for the naturalistic, or qualitative, researcher:

1. Case study reporting is supported by the reader's tacit knowledge, which allows for life-like descriptions similar to those found within the realm of the reader's experiences. This makes the final report more readable, which is of particular interest to those who may not be familiar with a more technical form of reporting.

2. This style of reporting is an effective vehicle for demonstrating the relationship between researcher and respondents; therefore, the nature and impact of this relationship can be better judged than in a more technical form of reporting.

3. Case study reporting provides the thick description that is essential to judgments of transferability; this is important to the person who is considering application of these or similar methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained:

The case study is, at its best, a "portrayal" of situation. It may read like a novel but it does so for the same reasons that novels read like novels -- in order to make clear the complexities of the context and the ways these interact to form whatever it is that the case study report portrays (p. 214).

4. The case report is more responsive to the axioms, or principles, of the naturalistic paradigm than is any other

form of reporting. Life's multiple realities are often difficult to express in technical form, as are the relationship between researcher and respondent, the values of both investigator and context, and other mutual sharings between them. This reciprocity is fully reported in the case study, and the voices of the participants lend depth.

Limitations of Case Study Reporting

Limitations exist, as well. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) discussion of these included the following:

1. It is difficult to assess the case study with traditional measures of validity and reliability; therefore, the qualitative researcher must take caution and prove the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Qualitative researchers are careful to establish credibility through such things as: a triangulation of data, or arriving at the same interpretation through a minimum of three independent approaches; prolonged engagement; peer debriefing; member checks; and the researcher's reflexive journal.

Great care is also taken with transferability. This is accomplished through the use of thick description in the report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the case study offers the reader an opportunity to make a personal judgement as to the study's validity (Stake & Easley, 1978) rather than

its being quantitatively determined prior to the reader's interaction with the study.

Reliability is discussed in terms of dependability, and objectivity is discussed as confirmability by the qualitative researcher. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested that one method for determining both dependability and confirmability is to again demonstrate the techniques which were used to assure validity "since there can be no validity without reliability" (p. 317). One of the strongest of these techniques is the triangulation of data; a second is a detailed reflexive journal which is kept daily by the researcher. However, regardless of the method employed, all findings must be grounded in the raw data which has been provided by the participants. These findings must be clear, logical, and appropriate.

2. Evolution of an adequate style of writing is difficult. One must consider both the conversational format that is important to the non-technical reader and the rigorous detailing required by the research community. Only then can the study contribute to all interested parties.

3. The researcher must be cognizant of ethical concerns at all times; for example, there is often difficulty in maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of information sources. At the same time, however, one must demonstrate that the information obtained for the case study stems from these participants rather than from the researcher's imagination.

The Procedure for this Study

Case Study Reporting in Relationship to this Study

Case study reporting was a primary tool in sharing out the analysis of data which originated from complicated young adolescents. Only by giving voice to their complexities could one begin to understand "...their basic human needs: caring relationships with adults, guidance in facing sometimes overwhelming biological and psychological changes, the security of belonging to constructive peer groups, and the perceptions of future opportunity" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 20).

In order to better examine these specific needs, four students from among this study's participants shared their world through interviews, reading response journals, formal writing assignments, group discussions, and questionnaire responses. The case studies were presented through a narrative reconstruction of these data collection instruments. Careful preservation of their voices added both depth and color to the social world of middle school students, and to the choices that teenagers make.

As in all qualitative studies, an analysis of the collected data required a grounded assessment of the study's context. This was of obvious importance, since the students who participated in this study were observed in a

naturalistic, or school, setting, and since all of the influencing factors required a strict accounting.

Western Middle School as Context

A visitor asks 21 sixth-graders if there is a single word that characterizes their school. They shout out in unison: "Proud!" (Lipstiz 1984, p. 28).

Western Middle School was characterized as "Proud Country" when Joan Lipsitz undertook a qualitative case study of the characteristics of four successful middle schools in this country. This school was labeled a success, and with good reason. She described it as

...an orderly and vibrant school. The colorful modern building, erected in 1978...(is) divided into four units or "houses." The sixth-grade house is green, the seventh is blue, eighth is peach, and a house with all three grades, dubbed "The Outhouse" by students, is orange... The "media center" is really a center. The four houses radiate out from the media center, which forms their architectural and symbolic hub. (There are no library fines in this school. "We want our students to read.") (p. 28).

This study was conducted within the "Proud Country" of this "orderly and vibrant school," which is home to approximately 650 students in grades 6, 7, and 8. It is structured around team configurations, which indicates that a small group of teachers instruct a common group of students. Advisor/advisee clusters are also a school focus and are called C.H.A.T. in order to make them more inviting.

(C.H.A.T. is an acronym for Creating a Helping Atmosphere Together.) These diminutive and intimate teacher-student interaction groups meet daily for a 25 minute period. Both small teams of teachers and advisor/advisory periods are important to this study's context, for they serve as major points of influence on the adolescents who attend this school.

Western Middle School is located in the town of Elon College, North Carolina, and is a part of Alamance County Schools. Lipstiz described this as being "...a stable, conservative, mostly rural area of factory workers, farm workers, professionals, small businessmen, and teachers at Elon College" (p. 29), and Western Middle is characterized by strong community support. She underscored the fact that to students, faculty, and community, this is "Proud Country" where "excitement and comportment are two competing values" (p. 31). This too is important to the developing adolescent, for it means that many of the students in this school find their parents to be concerned and involved in the many facets of the educational setting.

This educational setting, then, is one in which these parents are both proud and supportive, for their opinions have been solicited and respected from the first day of ground breaking. One parent said of the children, "They're not leaving an environment of love at home and coming to a school where people don't care. It's the same environment of love" (p. 43). Another shared, "A teacher from another school said

to me that a middle school is a holding ground. This school is a learning experience. The students get to try out everything" (p. 45). A third parent added, "I didn't mind the cooking, but I wasn't too pleased about my son sewing. But he enjoyed it, found it relaxing. And he took pride in his cross-stitch" (p. 54).

NOTE: This particular school was selected because the researcher taught here for 12 years, and within Alamance County for 15; therefore, a trusting relationship between researcher, community, and school faculty was already in place.

Selection of the Participants

Teacher

Janelle Timmons, a seventh grade teacher at this school, volunteered her reading classroom as the site for the proposed research. Having taught for 15 years, her experience level was matched to that of the researcher. This served a three-fold purpose:

1. Her career status created a feeling of equality between teacher and researcher, and enabled a more objective curriculum assessment by the teacher.

2. Her experience level allowed her to devote more time to both curriculum and hidden adolescent agendas, since much of the teaching process had become intrinsic.

3. Her experience level allowed her to evaluate the curriculum from a connoisseurship and criticism approach.

First discussed by Eisner (1991), this theory of program evaluation is especially applicable to the educational community because, as he noted, "In many important areas of human activity, the judgment of experts is relied upon because the features that matter in those fields cannot be quantified or dissected 'scientifically' " (p. 168). The educational connoisseur is characterized as one who "has a broad background of experience in his or her field of expertise, and also has a depth of theoretical understanding and educated taste" (p. 168). (See Appendix A for additional information on this approach to educational evaluation, as well as a copy of this study's evaluation instrument.)

NOTE: This act of the teacher volunteering a classroom rather than the researcher/administrator randomly selecting and mandating one was essential. This maintained the educational flow and sense of security that were already in place for students and teacher. The seventh grade level was selected because it falls mid-way in the middle school cycle; the students have had experience as adolescents, but do not see themselves as ready for the adult world of high school.

Students

As is suggested by North Carolina guidelines, this classroom housed 28 students. They were heterogeneously

grouped, which helped to ensure a mixture of demographics, including race, sex, socioeconomic status, family composition, cognitive abilities, and social sophistication. A more detailed look at the class and its individual members was necessary to ensure a literature-based curriculum which was developmentally appropriate, of relevant interest to the students, and educationally sound.

Therefore, it was noted that class demographic composition included 12 females and 16 males, who averaged 12.9 years in age. Class mean score on their sixth grade California Achievement Test was a national percentile ranking of 55 in reading and 60 in language arts. The mean score on their sixth grade writing competency exam was 2 (on a scale of 1 to 4), indicating a score of "average."

Other specific information included:

1. One student who was mainstreamed into this classroom from the Behaviorally and Emotionally Handicapped program.
2. One student who attended remedial classes.
3. Two students whom the teacher designated as highly motivated. This was evidenced by classroom performance, academic records, and general school participation.
4. One student who was recently reprimanded by the legal system for Breaking and Entering.
5. One student who had repeated a grade during the past three years due to poor academic performance.

The majority of this information was gathered through school records and confidential teacher interviews. Again, this broad informational base was important in order to ensure that the curriculum was not only developmentally sound, but was also of relevant interest to these young adolescents.

The Design of the Study

The design of the qualitative study is largely emergent, as the "...naturalist expects...changes and anticipates that the emergent design will be colored by them." These changes are not only anticipated, but are viewed as both constructive and vital to the study, "...for these changes signal movement to a more sophisticated and insightful level of inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 229).

The design for this naturalistic, or qualitative, study was based on the work of Lincoln and Guba. As was accounted for in their approach to research design, the theory emerged from within the study itself, and was, in turn, grounded in a vast body of collected data. As the study proceeded, the emerging frames of reference were constantly fine-tuned.

Data Collection Procedures and Instruments (See Appendix B for compilation of instruments.)

The Researcher as Participant/Observer

Spontaneous interviews. As a participant observer, the researcher elected to conduct spontaneous interviews with

members of the class and the teacher. These interviews arose as the result of a discussion, an unexpected twist to an assignment, or an intriguing comment made about the book an individual student was reading. Occasions also arose when parents had direct feedback to share and when children had personal situations that they wanted to discuss privately. These too invited interactions and an unanticipated interview.

Response to specific questions was generally provided in written form through private correspondence after a verbal discussion; however, on several occasions the interaction was strictly verbal and the resulting responses were entered in the researcher's reflexive journal. Tape recordings were generally avoided as they did not lend themselves to the spontaneity of the moment and tended to make the students feel "on the spot."

Additionally, when the entire class seemed eager to contribute, the discussion was initiated in written form through journal prompts. These were immediately read by the researcher and were then used as starting points for verbal discussion. This approach was possible because the class period was split by lunch; therefore, the researcher could read these journal entries while the students were in the cafeteria, and then the discussion could follow their return to the classroom.

Reflexive journal. The researcher also kept a reflexive journal of field notes that recorded and portrayed the day's

events, from the traditional routines of the classroom to the unexpected comments and observations that helped to later capture these events in a rich narrative form.

Her journal contained three sections. The first was a daily agenda, which recorded the day's lesson plans. The second was a diary of the researcher's personal reactions, intuitive responses, and student/teacher/researcher interactions. The third was a methodological log, which recorded changes that became necessary as private and class agendas became more apparent. (See Appendix K for a portion of this journal.)

Students

Questionnaires. Each participant completed a written pre and post-study questionnaire which had been structured around a discussion-style format. The questions focused on the types of decisions that the students most often face, the sources that they consult for guidance, the degree of satisfaction that they feel after the decision has been made, and the amount of time that they spend pleasure reading. The questions were basically open-ended in structure, which encouraged the students to describe decision making from their own frames of reference and in their own language. Each questionnaire was signed by the student in order to aid in the analysis of the resulting data.

It was necessary to modify the post-study instrument slightly by attaching an addendum to the first questionnaire. This was done for two reasons:

1. To acknowledge the actual reading that had been accomplished during the eight weeks of the study, and
2. To provide an opportunity for the students to evaluate the study. (See Appendix C for copies of both pre and post-study instruments.)

Structured Interviews. Seven students were also interviewed (two times each, pre and post-study) in order to lend a clear adolescent voice to the case study style of reporting. These students were selected from their initial questionnaire responses, and both they and their parents granted permission for the two sessions.

Their insights were elicited from an informal interview protocol which stemmed directly from the class responses to the questionnaires. It dealt primarily with the ways in which students described their decision-making processes, the factors which influenced them, and the ways in which they viewed the characters in selected realistic fiction. The informal construction of the protocol allowed the students to employ a conversational tone, to deviate into areas of personal concern, and to speak from their own frames of reference. Students were therefore stimulated to talk rather than to merely answer questions. All interviews involved the same basic questions although, like the questionnaire, the

second varied slightly in order to acknowledge the reading and discussions that occurred during the eight-week study.

In order to control for researcher bias, the interviews were conducted by a member of the educational community who had prior interview experience through Elon College. (See Appendix D for both interviewer information and copy of instrument.)

Reading response journals. The classroom curriculum took eight weeks to teach, and therefore encompassed roughly 40 class meetings of 50 to 55 minutes each. The students generally made one to two journal entries per day, beginning mid-way through the third week.

One (optional) prompt per day involved such things as personal reactions to the dilemmas and situations faced by the literary characters, objective assessments of the characters' handling of these dilemmas and situations, the students' own decision-making agendas, and occasionally, personal information which they wanted to share.

For example, the prompt given for Monday, May 25 focused on a previous class discussion and then moved students into an introspective look at personal agendas:

First: Talk a little about the list of decisions that you made between reading class on Friday and the same time (11:00) on Saturday. Concentrate on two or three. What were they and what did you think about while you were making each decision? Second: Can literature have any bearing on your personal decision-making agendas? If no, why not? If yes, how would you use it to help you make better decisions?

NOTE: Although each day's opening journal prompt was optional, the students were required to respond to the second phase of this particular cue. This was done in order to tally the results toward a final assessment of literature and its effect on these students' decision-making processes. As detailed in Chapter IV, 86% of them noted in this entry that literature indeed had a bearing on their decision making.

The students were encouraged to also make a second entry per day based on the books which they were reading at home, or perhaps a reaction to something read in class. Students therefore responded to both a topic that was important to the researcher and one that was important to them.

Reading journals were collected each Friday, processed over the weekend for the purpose of on-going data analysis, and returned on Monday for the next week's recordings. The researcher supplied the students with stenographer's pads for their recordings. (See Appendix E for information which was shared with the students. Appendix K features a daily agenda from the study, including each day's optional journal prompt.)

Discussion groups. These formal groups were organized around the individual book selections made in rounds one and two of the student-selected reading (and limited to four students per group). Discussion topics and questions were provided by the researcher, although the students were encouraged to take control of the group conversation.

The objective was three-fold and sequential. It was accomplished in this manner:

1. The students moved from reviewing personal decisions made by the literary characters to

2. Discussing how they would conduct themselves if they were presented with the same decisions. They then began to acknowledge through conversations and writings

3. How they might handle any number of related decisions that were not directly presented in the reading.

(See Appendix F for a sample prompt.)

The students based their discussions of the selected fiction on a structured decision-making model which was introduced earlier as a part of the curriculum (Durrant, Frey, & Newbury, 1991). By the study's conclusion, they were encouraged to adapt this model to their own lives with necessary personal modifications. Examples of personal adaptation were shared through class discussions, journal entries, and both the third and fourth formal writing prompts. (See Appendix G for both a copy of The DECIDE Model and MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN, and Appendix H for the third and fourth writing prompts.)

Formal writing assignments. These four writings stemmed from the class conversations, the books selected, and the research questions. Mrs. Timmons had already introduced the writing process in her classroom, and this approach was employed for each of these writings. (The exception to this

process was the peer review component; some students deemed the assignments too personal for public sharing.)

Four assignments were made and examined by the researcher. The first focused on how the student currently made decisions (analyzed for process, influences, an accounting for consequences, etc.). The second dealt with the way the characters in the second class novel, On My Honor, handled their decision-making situations. A third assignment involved student response to a dilemma presented in an excerpt from one of the class novels, Izzy, Willy-Nilly. The final assignment required that each student write a narrative in which a character was presented with any social dilemma or situation and thus a decision. (See Appendix H for copies of these specific assignments.)

Teacher

Questionnaire. The pattern followed was similar to that of the student questionnaire because it too was delivered pre and post-study. Additionally, the questions varied slightly in each instrument in order to confirm emerging themes.

Topics focused on such things as reading and writing instructional styles, the types of decisions that the teacher witnessed the students making, and her observations of adolescent peer relationships. (See Appendix I for questionnaire).

Interview. Questions were based on the reactions found in the questionnaire instrument. The format was similar to that of the student interview, and it too was conducted by an outside source. (See Appendix D for interview protocols.)

Field notes. Mrs. Timmons kept a daily journal of field notes. This journal served as a written record of both her observations concerning the students and her on-going assessment of the curriculum presented.

Development of the Instruments

The core of the student questionnaire came from a pilot study conducted at Guilford Middle School and Northeast Middle School (Guilford County Schools) in the fall of 1991. Two hundred and eight students were issued questionnaires which focused on student decision-making styles (Strahan, Jones, Potter, & Nadolny, 1992). This questionnaire was informal in structure, which allowed students to describe decision making from their own frames of reference. The questions were open-ended, which encouraged students to use their own language for discussing both how they felt about decision making and how they confronted it in their lives. By employing this bottom-up approach to the topic, the researchers allowed students the freedom that they needed for shaping responses in their own ways. This was important because it permitted the adolescents to control the conversation. (See Appendix J for the Project Decide instrument.)

The completion and analysis of this pilot instrument served as an informal field testing for the student questionnaire used in this study. Mrs. Timmons's questionnaire also indirectly involved items derived from the instrument completed by the Guilford County students.

Instruments in Relationship to Research Questions

Underlying all of the data collection and analysis were the four research questions introduced in Chapter I. Each was accounted for in the following way:

1. How do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors which influence their choices?

(described through researcher field notes and spontaneous interviews, student questionnaires, student interviews, formal compositions, and both the teacher's questionnaire and subsequent interview)

2. How do young adolescents view young adolescent characters in selected realistic novels?

(described through researcher field notes and spontaneous interviews, student interviews, reading journals, class/group discussions, formal compositions, and the teacher's journal observations)

3. When presented with a systematic framework for making decisions, how do young adolescents apply this framework to the analysis of situations in realistic fiction?

(described through researcher field notes and spontaneous interviews, student interviews, formal compositions, personal journal entries, and group/class discussions)

4. After a series of lessons that explore decision-making using realistic fiction, how do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors that influence their choices?

(described through researcher field notes and spontaneous interviews, student questionnaires, student interviews, reading journal entries, formal compositions, discussion groups, and both the teacher questionnaire and interview)

Classroom Presentation and Data Gathering

The purpose of this study was to describe how a literature-based curriculum influenced middle grades students' perceptions of social decisions that they may make. In order to accomplish this, the researcher spent a total of eight weeks (approximately 40 days) in a middle school classroom, meeting daily with a group of 28 seventh grade reading students.

Selection of Novels for Classroom Use

Careful thought was given to the 31 different novels which were selected for use with these reading students, as the researcher recognized that correct choices were vital to the success of the study. Rudman (1984) suggested criteria

that one might use when selecting books for classroom use. She underscored careful selection, noting that

as educators we have within our power the means to inculcate values, develop skills, influence attitudes, and affect the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and moral development of today's youth and tomorrow's adults (p.1).

She cautioned further that educators should lend a critical eye to the presentation of issues and the possibility of inherent negative messages. Additionally, students should be instructed as to appropriate techniques for book selection.

Criteria suggested by Rudman and employed by this researcher included the following (in generalized terms):

1. The book should be suitable to the child's developmental level.

2. The reader should be able to identify with the characters and plot because they are realistic, accurate, and of interest to the student. This includes parental, peer, and sibling interactions. Likewise, the setting should be relevant and authentic.

3. The solutions presented must be realistic, as well. Fairy tale endings and answers which are "too pat" are not valuable to the contemporary child.

4. If values are involved, they should be communicated clearly, and with an acknowledgement that these are a part of the author. Guilt should not be imposed on the reader if agreement is not felt. Opinions should be viewed as such.

5. Illustrations, if used, should portray real people in real situations, for they, too, convey a message to the reader.

6. The literary quality should be viewed as one of the most important factors in selection, for it will greatly affect the book's impact on the reader.

7. When dealing with nonfiction, the book should transmit an appropriate amount of information, and it should be accurate.

In addition to Rudman's suggestions, this researcher gave careful attention to the following:

1. Interest levels of the books, as noted by the publisher (included a wide variety);

2. Readability level of the book, as noted by the publisher (included titles from easy to challenging);

3. Books already included on the school's sixth and eighth grade reading lists (avoided overlapping titles);

4. Authors popular with middle school students (included many; for example, Lois Duncan and Gary Paulsen);

5. A similar number of male and female characters, with attention given to multicultural backgrounds as found within this classroom; and

6. Books that featured both good and poor decision-making habits (in order to facilitate discussion according to the study's purpose).

The Study

The researcher presented a total of 31 novels through booktalks. The students then read five of these books in class and a minimum of one at home. Novels one, two, and five were read to the students by the researcher. The third novel was read in student groups, and the fourth novel was read silently by the individual class members.

The first of these five novels was Who Invited the Undertaker? (Ruckman, 1989), and it was read aloud by the researcher. This book presented a comical look at a seventh grader, Dale. He was forced to confront typical adolescent concerns, although he did so in an exaggerated way.

On My Honor (Bauer, 1986) was the second book, and it too was read aloud and discussed. It featured a more serious description of adolescent relationships and how peer pressure can affect decision making in a regrettable way. It therefore provided students with a closer look at things which directly influence decision making and the resulting consequences.

The next two novels were individually selected by the students from among a total of nine different tradebook titles. Groups were formed based on the selection of common titles and limited to four students each. The first selection was read and discussed in a group setting with most of the groups electing to read their novel aloud. The second book was read individually, with some group discussion following. These nine titles included:

Round One titles (the third novel read):

Second Star to the Right by Deborah Hautzig (1981)

Slake's Limbo by Felice Holman (1974)

The Divorce Express by Paula Danziger (1982)

Bathing Ugly by Rebecca Busselle (1988)

The Boy Who Drank Too Much by Shep Greene (1979)

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen (1987)

I Know What You Did Last Summer by Lois Duncan (1973)

Added for Round Two (the fourth novel read):

The above listed seven, plus

Are You in the House Alone? by Richard Peck (1976)

The Language of Goldfish by Zibby Oneal (1980)

The procedure's intent was to move students from an adult-oriented class discussion into peer interactions, and finally, into private reflection. This introspection was enhanced by the introduction of 19 remaining titles which were used for pleasure reading outside of the classroom setting.

Each round of the reading (class novels 1 and 2, and group novels 3 and 4) moved the students into an increasingly serious look at decision making and its consequences. The study concluded with a fifth novel which was read aloud to the entire group. Like the first class novel, The Boy Who Owned the School (Paulsen, 1990) was a comedy and served to lighten the mood before the study concluded.

Because of the study's purpose, each of the books depicted adolescent characters in a variety of social situations and dilemmas which this group of adolescents had deemed common to their interests (this having been confirmed earlier by the classroom teacher). Focus for each book's discussion was therefore social decision making, first related

to the characters and then to the students. In order to structure this focus, the curriculum featured a systematic model for planned decision making (Durrant, Frey, & Newbury, 1991). (See Appendix G for copies of both this model and the decision-making plan which ensued.) Journal writing, group discussions, and formal compositions also factored into the classroom curriculum and therefore into the data collection. (See Appendixes E, F, and H, respectively, for copies of these instruments.)

The researcher shared all lesson plans with the teacher prior to implementation, and feedback from her was considered imperative because of her long-standing relationship with the students. The researcher also consulted the North Carolina Competency-Based Curriculum guide for grades 7-8 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1985), and she employed a variety of instructional strategies and questioning techniques. Emphasis was placed on keeping all classroom activities and data-collection instruments relevant to the developing young adolescent, and student evaluations of the study in progress were constantly solicited. Middle grades philosophies concerning effective approaches to classroom curriculum were given priority.

(See Chapter II, "Appropriate Approaches to Middle Grades Curriculum," and "Summary: Developing a Successful Curriculum for This Study." Also, see Appendix K for the following details concerning specific classroom procedures and data

gathering: a copy of the daily agenda from the researcher's reflexive journal; parental correspondence concerning the study and the classroom curriculum, including an itinerary from the opening parent meeting; two introductory activities which were designed to create an initial relationship between researcher and students; an annotated listing of all novels read during the study; a sample of the curriculum used for one of the class novels; and a Reading Score Card, which was completed by the students at the study's conclusion.)

Data Analysis

This study supported a qualitative focus based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who provided direction for the processing of the collected data. This procedure was ongoing, and it started at the completion of the first stage of data gathering, which included input from the opening three days of the study. This immediate start was crucial in order to "...facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 242).

The researcher was considered an important data-gathering instrument. Emerging themes and logistical concerns altered the initially proposed procedures to some degree, and were allowed to subtly guide the study. This was vital, as it enabled the students to set the agenda for curriculum development in ways that were both relevant and important.

The data analysis procedure was continuous and cyclical, as analysis, collection, and coding played off of one another. Perhaps an explanation for this was best expressed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) when they noted that

what is at issue is the best means to 'make sense' of the data in ways that will, first, facilitate the continuing unfolding of the inquiry, and, second, lead to a maximal understanding of the phenomenon being studied in its context (pp. 224-225).

Lincoln and Guba discussed some operational refinements to the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), whom they referenced in terms of the constant comparative method of data analysis. Specifically, they suggested that unitizing, categorizing, filling in patterns, and performing member checks were the primary components in qualitative data analysis.

Incorporating These Steps into This Study

As was mandated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), data analysis began immediately after the opening of this study, and it was completed in four phases: preparing initial data for analysis, unitizing data, categorizing it and filling in patterns, and accounting for member checks.

Phase one: Preparing the data. It was important to the researcher to initially lay down some type of basic groundwork, since the adolescents who were involved in the study were unknown to her. Therefore, introductory data focused on the development of a comfortable working

relationship with the children while still providing some initial assessment of them. These beginning sources of data, and their analysis, included the following:

The "Frustration Is..." cartoons (See Appendix K, Attachment 2) were immediately examined and common points of frustration among this group of children were noted. An initial reading provided the following categories as primary sources of stress: Family (both nuclear and extended); Peers; School (including subjects, grades, and teachers); and Self (including health, appearance, grades, habits, and sports abilities). A Tukey's Tally was utilized for totaling responses in each category.

Questionnaires were scrutinized, as well. Points of particular interest were provided by questions 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 11. (The remaining questions were included to foster an emotional reenactment of a situation. Other questions then followed which helped sustain this flow of emotional thought.) As in the "Frustration Is..." cartoons, a preliminary reading revealed common categories and responses were then tallied under these.

For example, question 1 required that students consider a social situation in which they had recently been involved. They were then asked to identify its setting and the situation itself. Common settings which they listed included home, school, the mall or other public places, and a friend's house. Common situations involved smoking, drinking alcoholic

beverages, stealing, cheating, and peer interactions (such as dating, racism, and slandering another's reputation).

Item 5 of the questionnaire asked each student to "describe in detail what you thought about while you were making your decision (if anything)." Each response was reviewed and logged under one of four categories. (Those who left this section blank were discounted.) These four categories, an explanation of each, and an example from the questionnaire responses included:

1. Immediate gratification: of the moment (whether to go to a party: "Are we going to have fun?" and whether to drink at a party: "Oh God! What if I drink too much and get a hangover?");

2. Short-range consequences: personal effects seen within a period of time, such as punishment, acceptance into a peer group, or damage to reputation within the peer group (smoking: "I thought I might get in their crowd." and smoking marijuana: "Pot is trouble and I don't want trouble.");

3. Long-range consequences: impacting on the future quality of life (smoking: "It's bad for my health." and drinking beer to fit into a peer group: "I thought about the consequences and how it might become a habit."); and

4. A mixture of short and long-range consequences (offered drugs: "What other people would think. They would think I was wimpy. But who cares what they think? I'm not the one who's going to die.").

An outside source then conducted interviews based on the questionnaire responses. The interviewer employed a back-up system which consisted of brief note-taking and two tape recorders. Additionally, she made observation notes at the conclusion of each session, highlighting such things as body language, voice tone, and level of observed comfort with the process. The researcher reviewed and discussed these notes with the interviewer. Each student's audio-tape was transcribed verbatim by a professional secretarial service. These were then ready for further data analysis.

Initial assessments were made as to the emotional and social composition of the class (to enhance appropriate interaction). Questionnaires were completed, and interviews were conducted and transcribed. A more serious approach to the data processing phase then began. Initial entry into significant analysis was made by unitizing the data as it was collected.

Phase two: Unitizing the data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), unitizing the data simply means determining overall units of information. This is of obvious importance, for without this initial step of identifying large divisions, one confronts a wealth of data with no idea as to organizational strategies. Careful attention to this phase is important, for these units will later serve to clarify smaller, specific categories.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed that a unit must have two characteristics: One, it must be heuristic, or "...aimed at some understanding or some action that the inquirer needs to have or take" (p. 345). Two, it must stand by itself, or be "interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out" (p. 345). They noted that such units are found in any pieces of data collected; for example, written materials, interviews, observational notes, and even nonverbal cues.

In order to determine common units or themes in this study, the researcher initially prepared the raw data by making marginal notes on a student's individual data, which was constantly being submitted. These notes focused on common frames of reference which were emerging from within the portfolios of the student's work. These notes eventually provided insight into which themes were most commonly referenced by the student. (For example: Whether the student considered the novel's characters to be realistic; how the individual described her/his decision-making agenda; where the student turned for advice, and thus influence; and if the student exhibited any personal connection to the character's situation.)

Once a common frame of reference, or a unit, was determined, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that all specific references to it be copied from the raw field data

onto index cards (or computer files). These copied notations might be sentences, phrases, or entire paragraphs as they were found in the original data, and again, as they related to the broad units, topics, or frames of reference. In this way, relevant information was recorded and that which did not pertain to the unit remained apart in the original stack of unused raw data.

Lincoln and Guba provided three caveats for the researcher: First, they cautioned that all notations must be copied in such a way that others besides the researcher can understand them. Second, they warned that it is imperative for the researcher to practice overinclusion, since it is easier to reject things later than to try and add them once the analysis is in its final stages. Finally, they noted that although this particular phase is very tedious,

carelessness at this stage will certainly result in a study that is less useful and insightful than it might have been, for everything else depends upon the quality of effort invested in this unitizing task" (p. 347).

Further, they suggested that each index card (or file) be coded in multiple ways so that one may retain location of the original source.

Following the suggestions of Lincoln and Guba (1986), this study employed the use of the following categories in this portion of the coding stage:

1. A designation for the source of the data (for example: journal) and the exact location within that source (for example: journal for May 14, paragraph B);

2. A designation for the respondent (for example: the student's "wish name"). This proved important when an individual's cards were shuffled into the class stack;

3. A designation for the site, because multiple sites were occasionally used (for example: classroom, cafeteria, or during an outdoor break); and

4. A designation for the particular episode during which the unit was collected (for example: interview 1, formal writing 3, or group discussion 2) (p. 346).

When common units had been determined and set up, the process of organizing the overall data began. This involved categorizing the information and filling in patterns.

Phase three: Categorizing data and filling in patterns.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that categorizing addresses a three-fold task:

1. Categorizing brings together into provisional groupings those cards that relate to the same content.

2. Categorizing devises rules which can be used to describe the category properties and to justify the inclusion of each card that has been assigned to the group.

3. Categorizing provides a basis for later tests of replicability, and therefore helps to render the category set as internally consistent.

Categorizing was completed in this study in this way:

1. The index cards which resulted from the unitizing step were read one at a time. As the first card was read, it was labeled as to content. This became the first category (which was more specifically defined than the unit topic).

2. Each successive card (from the composite stack of class cards) was read. If the content was a "look-alike" or "feel-alike" (p. 347) with Card 1, then it was added to the first card's category. If not, it became a new category. This continued with the remainder of the cards.

3. Sometimes cards did not seem to fit into any existing category, yet they did not seem justified as a new category. These cards were held together as a miscellaneous set (and were later reviewed for possible inclusion as frames of reference were further clarified).

4. Once a pile had reached a substantial size (perhaps eight cards), a propositional statement was written which described the group of cards. This statement was written onto a separate index card and placed in front of the pile of cards in the group. This statement was now viewed as a "rule for inclusion" into that stack of cards.

5. This process continued until all obvious categories were determined.

6. The following concerns were addressed after all of the categories had been determined for the data which had thus far been collected: First, each card was reviewed as to "fit"

according to that category's rule for inclusion. Second, if it was necessary to revise the rules, the cards in that category were reviewed and perhaps resorted. Third, cards assigned to the miscellaneous pile were also reviewed for possible inclusion into specific categories. Fourth, cards that were clearly irrelevant were discarded. Fifth, categories were reviewed for overlap, and care was taken to eliminate ambiguities. Finally, missing, incomplete, and unsatisfactory categories were earmarked for follow-up as the data gathering continued.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered a suggestion which provided guidance at this point, "Categorization can be accomplished most cleanly when the categories are defined (so) that they are internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible" (p. 349).

By following this procedure, data analysis moved from the general topics found in the unitizing stage to the narrowly defined "rules for inclusion" found through categorizing and filling in patterns.

Guba (1978) discussed the fact that categories may be pursued through the use of several available strategies. Included among these were extension (building on known items of information), bridging (making connections between items whose relationship is not clearly understood), and surfacing (becoming more familiar with an area, allowing a researcher to suggest new information and then to verify its existence).

As the study progressed, this researcher became most interested in extension (building on what was known about adolescent development and decision making as it related to this group of seventh graders) and bridging (describing these students' connections between their social development, social decision making, and realistic adolescent fiction).

Guba (1978) detailed first extension, and then bridging, in this way:

Extension: The inquirer begins with a known item or items of information and builds on them. He uses these items as bases for other questions or as guides in his examination of documents. Amoeba-like, he inches his way from the known to the unknown.

Bridging: The inquirer begins with several known, but apparently disconnected, items of information. The term "disconnected" simply means that their relationships are not understood. That they are relationships is a premise of high probability because the items have been placed into the same category. The [inquirer] now uses these two points of reference for further inquiry in an effort to identify the connections and understand them (p. 59).

Phase Four: Member checks The researcher cross-checked the students' understanding and frames of reference to see that they had been correctly categorized and interpreted. This was important because it assured the accuracy, and thus the trustworthiness, of this study. Because this was of primary importance to this researcher, she employed the use of member checks on a regular basis throughout the eight week period and immediately following it.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted the importance of the member check when assuring the trustworthiness of a study. They defined it as the point when "data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from which the data were originally collected" (p. 314). They noted further that it is "...the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314).

Member checks in this study were accomplished through spontaneous interviews, specific journal prompts, directed class discussions, and a video-taped group discussion which was later played back for the participants to review and discuss. In a final member check, a summary of the study's results was mailed to each of the 28 students and their parents for optional feedback. (Response was required from the four case studies [stamped and addressed envelopes included]). Mrs. Timmons received a full copy of Chapters IV and V for her written reactions (stamped and addressed envelope included).

Each of the four case studies and one student from the larger group responded, as did Mrs. Timmons. All feedback was reported in Chapter V.

Assuring Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the basic issue behind trustworthiness is actually quite simple. It provides answers for any one of several questions; such as: How can one be

sure that this particular study is of value? and What arguments could the researcher supply which would convince any skeptic that this is indeed a worth-while study?

They described specific techniques that one may employ when addressing these types of questions. The use of these procedures will assure that the study in question is indeed trustworthy. The techniques employed by this study included: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of data, the use of thick description, member checks, and the reflexive journal.

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is the investment of adequate time so that the culture can be understood, any misconceptions can be tested, and trust can be built. One caveat was outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985): Prolonged engagement often causes a researcher to feel like a member of the group, rather than a member of the research community. This can serve to undermine objectivity in both the data collection and the analysis, and care must be taken to guard against this abdication of impartiality.

This researcher was diligent in maintaining this objectivity, despite very intense daily instruction in a reading classroom for eight weeks. The researcher had initially planned to spend approximately two additional classes per day either talking with the teacher during a free

planning period or observing the students during C.H.A.T. time. However, after four weeks of following this schedule, she found that the students were still holding back their honesty and trust. She therefore opted to increase the time spent with the students, often staying for a full day several times per week. This escalated sense of intensity served to draw the students out in an unchecked and candid fashion.

Persistent Observation

The use of persistent observation was employed in this study to identify the characteristics in the study that were most relevant to the issues being pursued, and to focus on these characteristics in detail. In this sense, persistent observation added both saliency and depth to the study. Eisner (1975) noted that sooner or later the researcher must come to terms with the "pervasive qualities" involved, or those things that really count versus those that do not.

Persistent observation was accomplished in this study through an early identification of various frames of reference that were important to the young adolescent, as s/he interacted with the literary characters presented. These were then given special attention. Following the emergent design of the study, this fine-tuning continued as other themes began to surface and as other assignments and discussions ensued.

Again following the suggestions associated with prolonged engagement, a great deal of time was also spent in the

classroom simply observing the students (including teacher/student interactions in both their C.H.A.T. and science classrooms, and the social interactions that occurred during breaks and lunch).

Triangulation of Data

The triangulation of data involved the use of multiple, but different, sources which determined the same outcome. It was not possible to use multiple designs or investigators in this study because of the emergent nature of it. The study did, however, rely on multiple sources of data collection; for example, student questionnaires, interviews, journals, and formal class compositions. These were used to cross-check frames of reference in order to determine if the same interpretation could be derived from at least three independent sources.

Thick Description

Because naturalistic, or qualitative, research methods do not lend themselves to transferability in the strict sense, it was imperative that rich, thick description be included in the final report, a basic responsibility of the researcher. This was necessary so that other persons might understand the time and context in which the study was set, enabling them to make their own judgments about the transfer in question.

Member Checks

Actually a judgment of overall credibility, the member checks allowed the study's participants to examine the researcher's reconstructions of their frames of reference. Detailed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the member check was deemed "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314).

It was stressed that member checks are different from the triangulation of data, although the two are easily confused because "superficially these two techniques appear identical" (p. 315). However, member checking is conducted with respect to interpretations, constructions, and credibility, and a triangulation of data is concerned with judgment as to the accuracy of specific data items. Additionally, member checks are formal and informal, and they should occur continuously.

The need for frequent opportunities to check perceptions and insights were respected by this researcher, and thus great care was given to this facet of the study. Examples of informal member checks included spontaneous interviews with students and teacher, specific journal assignments, and directed class discussions. It should be noted that the entire class was occasionally used to check insights gained from a few members (perhaps those found within a particular group discussion, recurring journal notations which were not specifically assigned, or information garnered from the seven selected for additional interviews). According to Lincoln and

Guba (1985), this is important in that "insights gleaned from one group can be tested with another" (p. 314).

A more formal example of a member check involved a group discussion that dealt specifically with decision making. The researcher video-taped the discussion and then invited the group members to view the video. She stopped the tape at certain points to ask them such questions as "What is happening here?" and "Is it difficult for you to stick by your original choice when you are the lone 'hold-out' in a group decision?" From this feedback she determined that her perceptions matched those of the actual participants.

A final formal member check occurred at the close of the study. Each student and family was mailed a summary of the study's results and specific feedback was requested if the student or family felt that it was necessary. Each of the four case studies was required to review the document and provide feedback (stamped and addressed envelopes included). Mrs. Timmons received a full copy of Chapters IV and V for her written reactions (stamped and addressed envelope included).

Each of the case studies and one student from the larger group responded, as did Mrs. Timmons. These replies were shared in the evaluation section of Chapter IV.

Researcher's Reflexive Journal

Kept daily by the investigator in the study, the reflexive journal provided the base for a number of judgment

calls that the inquirer needed to make; for example, the extent to which her biases may have influenced the outcome. It involved the recording of personal notations of the researcher, such as the types of methodological decisions made and the reasons for making them. According to suggestions made by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the journal was divided into the following separate parts:

1. The daily schedule and logistics of the study;
2. A personal diary which provided the opportunity for catharsis, for reflection about what was happening in relation to the researcher's own values and interests, and for speculation about growing insights; and
3. A methodological log in which methodological decisions and accompanying rationales were recorded.

The first two sections received daily entries, but the third did not require this, as each day did not present a change in methodological plans. This, too, was in keeping with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion that "entries should be made on a daily basis in the daily schedule and personal diary, and as needed in the methodological log" (p. 327). (See Appendix K for the portion of the reflexive journal which contains the daily schedule and logistics of the study.)

Reporting the Data

The reporting of the collected data involved a rich description of the adolescents who participated in the study.

Focus was centered in their common concerns and decisions faced, where they turned for guidance in making these decisions, and the degree of satisfaction that they felt with the majority of the decisions that were made and executed. Again, the effects that literary role models may have on this decision-making procedure were described in detail.

Seven students in the class had been interviewed twice. Four of these seven produced complete data sets over the course of the eight-week study. These four data sets made significant contributions to the understanding of adolescent decision-making agendas and the ways in which a curriculum of realistic fiction might enhance them. These four stories emerged as case studies from within the larger group context of the reporting.

In order to preserve the voice of each case study (and Mrs. Timmons), her/his response to each of the study's four research questions was presented in a reconstructed narrative fashion (as was Mrs. Timmons's description of her students). This was done by merging each participant's data into a conversational response. It was accomplished in this way:

1. Quotations were presented in the sequential order in which they were collected from all aspects of classwork and interviews. This established a sense of progression through the four research questions. This was appropriate because each question was originally integrated into the curriculum sequentially.

2. Transitional words were added between quotations only when necessary, and on occasion a brief portion of the question was incorporated into the response when clarity was needed.

3. Titles of books were often merged into the response when the student did not specifically state them.

4. All errors in spelling were eliminated.

5. Many mistakes in punctuation were corrected, as well, although several were occasionally left behind in order to preserve the flavor and appearance of the original quotation.

6. The integrity of the initial response was preserved at all times and in no way was the student's intent changed.

7. The reconstructed narratives were presented in italics in order to distinguish them from the remainder of this document.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) supplied careful detail as to the writing, operational steps, reviews and revisions for all data reporting. These guidelines were respected within the context of the description. A full narrative accounting of the data was presented in Chapter IV. (See Appendix L for both student and teacher consent forms.)

Summary of Design

This study was qualitative in nature and was based primarily on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985). As was

suggested by their guidelines, its design was partially emergent, with new emphases evolving from within the flow of the data collection. General framework was supplied by the study's four research questions.

Introductory questionnaires were completed by the 28 students. A list of topics was taken from them, and these provided themes which served as both a description of the students' social world and their initial decision-making agendas. Other data-gathering instruments provided illustrations of these themes; for example, reading response journals, formal writing assignments, and written responses to group discussion questions.

A preservation of student voice was considered vital to a rich understanding of the adolescent; therefore, the study's participants communicated in their own language, and they placed emphasis on the things which they deemed important. This freedom of description continued as the study moved sequentially through both research questions and curriculum.

The questionnaire was again administered at the close of the study. Each student's description of her/his decision-making agenda was compared to the introductory questionnaire in order to assess growth in decision-making skills. This growth was further substantiated through other instruments; for example, the fourth formal writing assignment and the reading response journals.

Adolescent voice was transferred verbatim into the final report from the data-gathering instruments. The students selected "wish names" for the purpose of reporting their voices in a personal yet anonymous way. Each student spoke at least once in the final report, and most spoke several times.

Four case studies were selected, interviewed, and highlighted from within this class context. Descriptions from these four students were used to illustrate the growth in decision-making skills that occurred during the study, with emphasis given to the influences of realistic fiction. Their stories were shared as reconstructed narratives.

Data analysis followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) phases of unitizing, categorizing, filling in patterns, and conducting member checks. Conclusions, drawn from this analysis and detailed in Chapter V, include:

1. These young adolescents are developmentally capable of both understanding and implementing a structured approach to decision making. (Students appear to now know more about mature decision-making habits. They also indicate a willingness to assume increased responsibility for the decisions which they make. Finally, their descriptions demonstrate that they fully understand the DECIDE model and can implement it as they wish.)

2. Realistic fiction can serve as a successful foundation to reading within the contemporary middle grades classroom.

3. If handled appropriately, both an enhanced approach to decision making and a fondness for pleasure reading will transfer from the classroom into life, in at least a majority portion of the students.

CHAPTER IV**RESULTS**

My decisions have not been too great. I don't like the ways I've taken. I don't like the path I've chosen. But I can't change it.

--Beth

The only decision I've made recently is how to ask a girl who I like to date me. While I was talking to the girl on the phone my friend beeped in and I told him my problem and he told me what to do and it worked.

--Martin

I have a friend who lives with her grandmother. Her mother lives far away. Her grandmother is talking about her mom a lot. She (the friend) really loves her mom. She thought she could not talk to me. I told her that she is my best friend and she can talk to me anytime. She asked me what I thought she should do and if I thought her mom will exactly come and get her.

Those were some very hard questions to answer. After I had thought about it, I told her it seems like she really loves her mom and I hope her mom loves her. I told her to just wait and see. Her mom may come and get her. I told her she could talk to me anytime.

--Sara

I have really enjoyed reading these books and discussing things about young adults and teenagers. I really feel about things different now. I thought that I was the only one that had problems but now I have noticed that I'm not.

--Grant

Growing... Changing... Becoming... Young adolescents are indeed a unique and diverse collection! They come into the middle grades sporting a variety of sizes and shapes, and they

bring with them an overwhelming amount of emotional baggage. Temptations... Insecurities... Mood swings... A fluctuation between dependence and independence... A desperate search for sophistication... Emotional peaks and valleys... All are common descriptions of the emerging social life of these contemporary adolescents.

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe how a literature-based curriculum influenced middle grades students' perceptions of the social decisions that they may make. In order to vicariously invite the reader into the social world of these adolescents, the use of thick description was employed. This was accomplished according to the guidelines set by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work on naturalistic, or qualitative, inquiry.

This description evolved during an intense course of study in a seventh grade reading class at Western Middle School. The eight-week agenda focused on a total of 31 novels which were selected and provided by the researcher. Each of these titles featured literary peers who were immersed in a series of social dilemmas and situations common to this group of seventh grade students. (Final approval of the list had been given earlier by their teacher, who confirmed that the situations were indeed typical of this group.)

Classroom Procedure

The researcher stepped into the role of classroom instructor, and the 28 students read Who Invited the Undertaker? as an entire group. In discussing the novel, she briefly introduced a planned decision-making model. (See Appendix G for this DECIDE model.)

The instructor also approached the second novel, On My Honor, from a whole-group format. This book revealed a more serious look at decision making and its consequences. She thoroughly discussed the DECIDE model during the reading of this second title, and the students developed a detailed understanding of its application to both fiction and life.

The instructor then presented seven novels through booktalks, and the students chose individual favorites, forming four-member groups for the reading of the third title. These books moved the children into a world which presented an increasingly somber look at decision making, influential factors, and consequences.

She shared two additional titles as companions to the original seven presented for group reading, and then a fourth novel was selected. Students were encouraged to read and reflect on this round of titles individually. Like the books which had preceded them, these two carried the students deeper into the world of social decisions with serious ramifications.

The fifth, and final, class novel both returned the students to a whole-group setting and provided closure to the

study's discussion. Like the first novel, it was a comical look at life through the eyes of an adolescent, and it served to lighten the mood before summer dismissal.

The students also enjoyed books of choice outside of the classroom during the eight-week study, including three selections which were audio-taped. The instructor booktalked these additional 19 titles early in the investigation, and the students had constant access to them.

The DECIDE model provided focus for each of the class and home readings, and daily entries were made in reading response journals. A myriad of other data collection instruments and curriculum components provided threads which wove the novels together. (See Appendix K for a full class agenda.)

Reporting the Results

Chapter IV detailed the thick description which resulted from this intense classroom study. In order to fully portray these students and the scope of their social world, this chapter reported their conversations in six sections.

The first section introduced the reader to the world of the young adolescent: Western Middle School as general context, and then more specifically, their teacher, her classroom, and her candid description of these students.

The second segment opened the private door into the social world of these emerging teenagers, as it swept the

reader along through a panoramic view of their initial decision-making situations and approaches.

The third portion drew the reader into changing adolescent itineraries by sharing the students' views on decision making as the study progressed through the novels and their discussions.

The fourth part reported their closing views of decision making based on their interactions with realistic fiction.

The fifth section crystallized the evolution of these decision-making agendas through the specifics found within four case studies. Alan, Misty, Larry, and Liberty detailed their changing dynamics as they revealed themselves in intimate and colorful detail. Each of these students provided a unique and compelling description of adolescent growth as narrated by her/his own voice. Framework for their conversations was provided by the study's research questions:

1. How do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors which influence their choices?
2. How do young adolescents describe young adolescent characters in selected realistic fiction?
3. When presented with a systematic framework for making decisions, how do young adolescents apply this framework to the analysis of situations in realistic fiction?
4. After a series of lessons that explore decision making using realistic fiction, how do young adolescents

describe their decision-making processes and the factors that influence their choices?

The sixth, and final, section provided closure to the classroom agenda through candid evaluations of this study. Furnished by both students and teacher, these frank and sincere conversations supplied both completion and additional insight into the participants' perspectives. Responses to the final member check were also reported in this section.

Introducing The Participants and Their World

Their World: Their School

Western Middle School is a colorful place. It is quiet, yet exciting; structured, yet relaxed. There is a sense of purpose to this school. Lipsitz (1984) described Western Middle in this way:

The lights are off in the corridors to save energy. Everything is peaceful. There are open cubbies instead of locked lockers. There is no theft. Students walk quietly in the corridors. "Why?" they are asked. "So as not to disturb the media center," they answer, which is self-evident to them but not to the visitor, who is left wondering, "But why? What makes them so concerned about the needs of others?" (p. 27)

Lipsitz continued her discussion with a notation about the (former) principal's attitude concerning these children. This attitude serves as a glimmer of explanation for the visitor's question, and thus the perspectives of these

students. She wrote, "Mrs. Parrish loves middle-school children, and she insists that they are vulnerable people with sensitive emotions who must never be embarrassed. 'They are adults today, children tomorrow. They need understanding, not harshness or permissiveness. They need respect.' "(p. 32).

Although Wilma Parrish has retired, her sense of student respect is still evident at Western. A child-centered place, the physical environment is divided into four wings, or houses, which radiate from the media center like spokes around a wheel's hub. Each of the school's three grade levels (6, 7, 8) is located in one of these houses, with "special" teachers established in the fourth wing. (This group of teachers includes, among others, the Learning Disabled instructor, and the art, chorus, and drama teachers.) The sixth grade house is green, the seventh blue, the eighth peach, and the "outhouse," where these special teachers reside, is red.

Plants fill the corridors, and huge bulletin boards are everywhere, as well. These often feature students who are designated as the school's "Best of the Braves," or perhaps they offer an invitation to visit the library or to participate in some after-school event. Color abounds.

Teachers here worry over their students, and they give them outdoor breaks as the weather permits, or perhaps a few minutes of social time at the end of a particularly difficult class assignment. It is not uncommon for a teacher to pull out a treat bag during break, to use cookies for descriptive

writing, or to apply brightly colored M&M's to a math lesson on percentages. These teachers know their students well.

Their World: Their Teacher

One of these teachers is Mrs. Janelle Timmons. She has been a member of this faculty for 6 years, and has taught within the educational community for 15 years. Located in the seventh grade house, Mrs. Timmons is part of a 5 person team, and is responsible for teaching math, science, and reading to 3 separate groups of 28 students each. Like all teachers at Western Middle School, she is responsible for a small group of 15 students whom she advises during an advisor-advisee period called C.H.A.T. (Creating a Helping Atmosphere Together).

When calling upon her experience base and her personal interactions with young adolescents, Mrs. Timmons describes middle school students in this way:

Typical adolescents are interested in their friends, their social life... They are not interested in school unless their parents offer some type of pressure or reinforcement. Their cliques are changeable. They fluctuate from season to season. Usually the cliques that I have observed center around sports or cheerleading or misbehavior.

Young adolescents are also usually very hyper, don't make very good decisions, and are more concerned with their friends than they are with their school work.

Their World: Their Classroom

From the moment one enters Mrs. Timmons's seventh grade classroom, it is easy to observe that she accounts for these

peer interactions and social motivations in her daily instructional schedule. By doing so, she commands the respect of these students, and she, in turn, respects them and the complex phases of their physical, social and emotional, and intellectual development.

One testimony to this is the note of excitement that seems to live within this classroom, as if the students pay attention to see what their teacher will do next. Another witness to this reciprocal feeling between students and teacher is the group of children who seem to cling to her, soliciting advice or simply seeking an adult confidant. Others pass her notes at the end of class, often as frequently as they slip their peers private writings.

One student angrily recounted another member of this teaching team who apparently said something uncomplimentary about Mrs. Timmons a few days ago. "We fixed him," the girl blurted out. "He's just jealous, and we let him know it!"

Perhaps this hint of jealousy is true, for there is a unique air of electricity that seems to charge this particular classroom. It excites these students, and it bonds many, though not all, aspects of the curriculum to them.

This study was most concerned with the reading curriculum which was in place within this classroom. Mrs. Timmons described her approach to reading and writing instruction by noting that "I combine the two, presenting them as inseparable--one improving the other, dependent upon each

other. I choose current literature or interesting short stories, plays, poems-- sprinkling them with many discussions and vocabulary taken from context."

This seemed to be working, yet only to a degree. Although she originated from inclusive training as an elementary school teacher, Mrs. Timmons has been offered little formal training in reading instruction as it applies to adolescents. She has therefore had to "basically figure it out on my own." Her frustrations became obvious when she discussed her 28 students.

Their enthusiasm for pleasure reading is almost nonexistent. Students have been bored so long with assigned textbook readings that they tend to view most reading as for homework only, and never for pleasure. I'd say that I have maybe two students per class who are avid readers.

It would seem that Mrs. Timmons's assessment was correct. When asked to respond to this study's introductory questionnaire, 68% of these students replied that they liked to read. However, 25% of them said that they actually spent less than 20 minutes per day engaged in reading something of choice. Additionally, 21% said that they never read anything at all, and 9% noted that they read on occasion, but not regularly. (See Appendix C for a copy of this questionnaire.)

Having noted a steady decline in students' interest levels in reading over the past several years, Mrs. Timmons has found that conventional approaches to curriculum are no

longer effective. She therefore abandoned many of her former techniques, and turned to shaping a curriculum where "the basis of...assignments are taken from novels and the students' own personal experiences." It was because of this restructuring that she invited this study into her classroom, noting that "I have presented decision-making models when teaching health in the past, and am most interested in their application to adolescent literature."

One reason she was interested, she explained, was because of her deep concerns over her current students' social lives, which seemed to control everything that they said and did. She spoke at length about this aspect of their development.

Mrs. Timmons Describes Her Students

I think that goals are superimposed for these adolescents in that their parents tell them they must complete each year of school. So their goal is to make it to the end of the school year, but I don't think to them that is a goal they choose for themselves. It is a decision that is made for them. They may have a personal goal of making so-and-so team or cheerleading or being with a group or going with a certain person, but as far as career goals, I hear a few children saying "I want to be this or that when I grow up," but other than that, I think that's as far as they take it.

Typically, their relationships are very immature. They're still writing notes and they don't date as per my

definition of the word date. It used to be what was called in my day "going together." When I first heard the word "date" I thought it was like get in a car and go somewhere. This is not a car date. This is to say that they are associating with each other. The dating relationships are just as changeable as the clique relationships. One day in-- one day out. There are a few relationships that do last, but these are probably one or two per grade level that last a month or two, and those are the exceptions rather than the rule.

These decisions about whom to date, whether to cheat, and that means copying homework or on a test or anything that takes work from one and copies it one way or another-- they see nothing wrong with that. They know it is wrong, but I guess they rationalize and that is a common decision that many of them make. To disobey rules is another common decision that they face daily.

I think they typically turn to their friends as their first sounding board when they're trying to make a decision about something. Second, depending on their relationship, may be parents and also depending upon the type of problem. Unless it were a problem of someone physically hurting them, I doubt if they would go to the parents. If it were a social problem that they were being faced with, I'd say nine times out of ten they would seek peer suggestions.

Sometimes they might ask teachers. It just depends on the teacher. Some teachers are more approachable than others

and it depends upon if the student thinks the teacher can be trusted, if they are approachable, if they present themselves in a way that invited the students to approach them with different concerns.

Let me give you an example. One of my homeroom students decided to sell condoms in my room to make money. (NOTE: He was later identified in this report as Phill.) The other children told me he had been doing it for a while. This was told to me before the event. He had stolen them from the local food mart. When I caught him selling them, he seemed very calm. The office wrote a discipline notice with punishment of In-School Suspension and an apology to the teacher. When I asked him about the apology, he just said, "Oh sorry" in a complacent voice.

The student told me in private, the next day, that he had not thought of the consequences or ramifications of selling condoms in the classroom. He seemed truly sorry. I feel he handled this part well, but the initial decision was not thought through at all.

One morning after that he offered a few comments in our C.H.A.T. group about his family. He said he and his mother and brother were riding in the car one day and he asked her, "If you had to choose between our stepfather and us, who would you choose?" She answered, "I'm not going to have another marriage to fail; I'd choose him. He's my husband."

The other kids in C.H.A.T. were horrified and were very sympathetic and offered a lot of support. I didn't even get a chance to respond because they were right there for him.

**The Students' Initial Descriptions of Decisions
That They Had Recently Made**

Their World: Home

The fact that so many of "the other kids were horrified and were very sympathetic" seemed reflective of their positive family attitudes. Family conflict rarely dominated the general discussion which these students shared, although it was present at times in an expected sort of way, given their age-characteristic struggle for autonomy.

When lengthy discussions of family did surface, they did so out of anger, a power struggle, or a sense of helpless confusion. These three attitudes are evidenced by three of these children, the first of whom is the embittered young man that Mrs. Timmons referenced.

...the rules in my house stink. My mom won't let me go anywhere till she gets home. I get home at 3:50. She gets home at 5:00, 1 hour and 10 minutes later. So then she's about 1/2 hour late, all the time, and I have to study for 15 minutes. Then she makes me wait another 10 minutes before I can go out, so THEN she only gives me another 1 hour and 1/2 to go out, but she HAS to know where I am at all times. So I don't get enough play time and I don't have enough privileges-- in other words, I'm treated like a 5 year old.

--Phill

I needed to talk...about something that I have had a problem with. I hate to say this, but I don't like my step-dad and one of my step-brothers. They both tell lies to get me in trouble.

I don't get along with either one of them. I just don't see someone else trying to be my dad. He comes in my house and starts telling me what to do. I see my dad every other weekend. Sometimes I wish to live with him, and sometimes I don't (stepdad). I just don't want to have anything to do with him. Sometime I just don't talk to him so we won't get into an argument. And then I will get to get out of the house just to get away from him.

--Grant

My sister gave her baby up for adoption. I never really accepted it. My sister just wasn't ready for another baby. She already had one. She wasn't making enough money on her job and her husband had died before the baby was born....I never really can stand it when I think about it. After the baby was born she was given to a lady that had went to our church....She had said that we could see the baby anytime we wanted to. But that changed. After the legal adoption, she didn't want us to see the baby anymore. That hurt me so bad. Still I think about the baby all the time....And I love her very much.

--Melinda

These students were atypical of this group, although many children cited smaller family arguments which concerned differences in opinion as to various rules or codes of conduct and dress. In fact, when the introductory questionnaire asked them to describe a recent social decision, only 14% noted that it involved a family setting. Further, when asked whom this class consulted for guidance with difficult social decisions, 71% noted that they sought advice from a consortium of people which included their parents. One young lady shared thoughts that provided summary for the general group attitude:

I feel that I get along with my parents pretty good. Sometimes I sass at my mom and get in trouble, but that's life. Of course I get in trouble. I'm not a goody goody. But I get along with my parents really well.
 --Treena

Their World: Peers

A closer look at the types of decisions that they reported did not reveal a group of students who were "goody goody." Rather, there emerged an array of young adolescents who regularly faced challenging social decisions. Initiation into this closer look can be found in their responses to the opening questionnaire's prompt: "Think back to a time when you have been faced with a difficult choice or temptation, one that involved other people in a social setting (including school). Describe the setting where you were, and then describe the situation in detail." The decisions which they described are tallied in Table 1.

Table 1
Social Decisions Made by These Students

Situation Involved:	% of Responses
General peer interactions	41%
Tobacco products	21%
Alcohol	11%
Cheating	9%
Shoplifting	7%
Drugs	7%

The introductory questionnaire revealed that 41% had recently been involved in predicaments which resulted in decisions involving peer interactions (relationships, fighting, dating decisions, etc.). This category, and the others listed, give an overview of the social world in which they live and the daily decisions which they must make.

Illustrations of Their Social World and Its Decisions

Eager to discuss their social life, these students shared a kaleidoscopic view of the adolescent world as they lived it. They were, at all times, highly cognizant of their peer relationships; they acknowledged that these were both negative and positive, and that they were generally powerless to resist them. These interactions and influences surfaced in all conversations, on all topics, at all times. They shared their thoughts concerning not only these friends, but also the dynamics of their social agendas. Although they spoke individually, their commonalities were obvious, their insecurities evident, their honesty raw.

Peer interactions. It is during this time in the life span that adolescents begin to pull further into their peer groups and the society which surrounds them, generally choosing this source of interaction over that of family. This acknowledgement of peers as paramount in the social scheme of life surfaced constantly through both written and verbal conversations with this group of emerging young adults. In

doing so, it became apparent that the bid for peer approval surpassed not only family agendas, but often personal ones as well.

My friends don't really influence my work, (but) they influence my attitude. Like if I hang around a good crowd I act good. If I hang around a mean crowd I act mean to teachers and other students that I'm not hanging around with.

--Scottie

You want to do what your friends do. You don't want to disappoint your friends. I like my friends to be loyal, trusting, secretive, nice. I don't want one that will lie to me. I have this friend. She went with this boy. This other girl, her supposed to be friend, kissed her boyfriend. My friend heard about this and asked her if she did kiss him; tell her so she would know the truth. Her friend then told her that he kissed her but she didn't kiss him. Then she wrote her a note just now and said her lips didn't touch his. My friend is very mad. I think she might try to fight her when they get alone.

--Sara

Fighting is almost like a sport to me. I like fighting. I can't go a month without trying to start one. To most people, they see it as cruelty and red necky, but I see it as a challenge and something fun to do, or adventurous and exciting, to see who will come out on top.

--Phill

Friends influence me a lot. I think they make about half my decisions. When I see my friends doing something, I want to do the exact same thing. Because one reason is I like having a good time, and another one is that I like being with my friends.

--Jennifer

Tobacco products. The description of peer interactions continued in more specific terms throughout subsequent conversations. For example, this particular class cited

tobacco products as providing the single most common social decision for them (21%). The group later confirmed verbally that situations concerning tobacco were indeed routine.

Although some of the students had decided to succumb to the peer pressure which surrounded the decision, others had not. Many of these students had made firm convictions to avoid the smoking habit, several noting that it was because some family member or peer smoked, and that they found this "nasty" or "stupid."

I was hanging out with my friends and one of them took out a pack of Marlboros and handed one to all of us. They seen me not smoking. He took out his lighter and lit up my cigarette. He said, "Go ahead. Smoke it." So I went ahead. I got to liking them and got hooked. Later I quit.

--Tom

Smoking is a very bad habit. I don't smoke but many 7th graders do. I don't see anything cool in it. It changes your life, hair color, attitude. And that's how you lose friends. My friend did smoke. She says it made her problems go away. I don't think it helped at all.

--Jessica

I do not smoke. Personally, I think it's stupid. I don't think it's cool!...Having something that can kill ya hanging out your mouth. It looks like a bull getting ready to run. Smoke coming out your nose! That would be like a person with a gun in their mouth.

--Melinda

I feel very strongly about smoking. My father smokes. In our old house he smoked inside. The furniture and carpet smelled like smoke all the time. I have decided to not smoke because his breath smelled all of the time. It was nasty.

--Keith

I don't know if I would try a cigarette or not. I might would just to see how it is and then no more. I think it isn't pretty to smoke, even though my dad does it. But I can't control my father. I can't call him stupid, but I really think it is stupid to smoke.

--Grant

Alcoholic beverages. Alcohol, too, played a role in the emerging social decisions of these young adolescents (11%), and it was the second single situation which they deemed most familiar. Although many students had either not personally confronted this decision or had refused to participate, those who had decided to drink had done so in a rather profound way. Of the two who openly described drinking to extreme, neither expressed a reason for quitting that went beyond the superficial level of taste or result.

My parents were out of town and my brothers and sisters were throwing a killer party in my field at my house in front of my pond. I decided to drink some PJ we had made that day. I didn't think they would ask me to because I'm only 13, but they did and I drank one glass. I thought, "Oh God! What if I drink too much and get a hangover!" I got sick and I learned not to drink too much of PJ.

--Melinda

I have been in plenty of situations where I was forced to drink. I have about 5 times in my life drank. It wasn't just beer, it was hard liquor. I did all my drinking either last year or the year before. I decided to stop drinking because I really didn't like the taste! I've never gotten drunk before. The worst thing I ever drank was a glass full of Jim Beam and Mello Yello or a glass of vodka and OJ.

--Martin

Cheating. Mrs. Timmons's discussion included her observation that cheating was extremely common among students this age. She found that "...whether to cheat, and that means copying homework or on a test or anything that takes work from one and copies it one way or another-- they see nothing wrong with it. They know it is wrong but I guess they rationalize..."

This point of commonality and acceptance seemed to weave its way through many of their thoughts, and thus Mrs. Timmons was proved correct by the students themselves. Only on very rare occasion did a student note that cheating was wrong; rather, it was socially acceptable, and actually expected, among the members of this class.

This acceptance was, perhaps, one reason that this decision was not listed frequently in the opening questionnaire; it seemed to be something that was as routine as coming to class each day, and therefore it was something that received little thought. One student even shifted the blame to the teacher.

I have cheated before in math because the dumb teacher talks about his dog and Sesame Street. So I get really mad and can't understand it. Because he makes something so easy hard.

--Treena

Cheating is not so big. You either do it or you don't. It's not so big as it used to be. About everybody does it without thinking because it's so common to do without thinking about it.

--Ray

Cheating is very common in the whole school. Especially on the C.A.T. That is the biggest test any school student would face.

--Sara

I have cheated many times. I only cheat if I have a short amount of time to do something or didn't do it at home. I never cheat on tests, just on homework! Everybody I know cheats.

--Martin

Cheating is one of the things people do once in life. People can die because of cheating or stealing something. I cheated on a crossword puzzle today in second period.

--Chuck

Shoplifting. Attention was again returned to Mrs. Timmons's opening description of this group. She referenced a young man who had stolen condoms from the local food mart in order to sell them in class. Shoplifting was a topic which surfaced periodically in the writings and discussions of these students, particularly the males in the class.

As with cheating, there were mixed emotions involved, but the majority admitted that many people whom they know shoplift. Adding this generally complacent attitude to their open acceptance of cheating shed light on the group's sense of values development and levels of individual integrity.

Me and my friends walked into a store. I had twenty dollars. My friends wanted me to steal something. I told them I would buy it. But they told me to just steal it. And told me to keep my money. I told someone else to and they did it cause I didn't want to. So that person stole it.

---Tom

I think stealing should be stopped. I guess it's alright to steal little things that don't cost hardly nothing, but if people can't afford it, they don't have to steal it.

--Wallace

Stealing is on everybody's mind but only a handful have the gall to do it and about everybody in a class or community knows somebody who does it or is thinking about it and I don't really care if they do or don't. You still stay the same, no better, no worse.

--Ray

I know a lot of people who steal. They only steal from stores like Ken's Quicky Mart. They steal things like gum or candy. One of them wanted me to steal but I decided not to. They didn't really care that I said no.

--Martin

Drugs. Drugs did not seem to be an immediate concern to this group, although they were later listed as situations that they knew their friends commonly dealt with, or which they themselves feared would become commonplace during their high school careers. Those who did mention them did so with the implied understanding that the business of "Just Say No" took an element of both courage and conviction.

I was at camp at the City Park and another kid tried to get me to smoke marijuana and get high. I knew he was trying to be cool and wanted me to go in on it with him. I decided I'd better leave.

--Phill

I was at an older friend's house and they were having a party. I was offered to take drugs. Everything was fine until then. A lot of my friends was doing it. I couldn't believe my friends would do something like this to me. It was very unlike them. Some friends, HUH? All of my friends know that I wouldn't ever do it. But I feel like I was being pressured to do something that I

didn't want to do. It made me feel bad and I realized what kind of friends they were. I decided to leave. I called a ride to come pick me up.

--Melinda

Sexual participation. The introductory questionnaire called for an unlimited listing of situations which the student had either recently faced or which involved someone whom they knew. No one included sexual participation in the listings, yet several seemed anxious to discuss it within the privacy of their journals, particularly the males in the class. Many returned to the pressures for peer conformity and status.

Drugs and sex, in my opinion, are things teens and adolescents do because they're not supposed to, they're curious, or their peers choose for them to do it. I think sex is something teenagers use to be popular, for instance, they'll talk about it saying they had sex when they really didn't. It's like saying you did something that not everybody does, but you're not supposed to do it either, which makes it more awesome or cool. Another problem is teenagers have sex and get a disease or have a baby at a young age.

--Phill

I think that sexual intercourse is a problem also in 7th grade. Most of the pressure about this issue is from your peers.

--Tonya

Sexual decisions are almost common to everybody because of the age of today. It's like a status sign. It says whether you're in the crowd or out, usual or unusual. At times it's peer pressure to do it as well, and if you do you brag and make it well known as many times as you do it...

--Ray

The Study Progresses

This study moved quickly through its eight-week course, dramatically affected by these descriptions of a social world that is fully known only to those who are a part of it. To these young adolescents, those eight weeks created a bridge between initial descriptions and a closing sense of both personal control and enhanced awareness. These students had established a mindset that would, for many, continue over the summer months, and perhaps beyond those months, as well.

Their questionnaire responses provided a succinct and tangible tally of their growing understanding concerning their social world and realistic fiction. Although many of these responses were discussed elsewhere in this report, a partial compilation of them at this time supplies a framework for the eight weeks in progress. In doing so, it demonstrates the bridge that was created between their initial descriptions and their closing sense of enhanced awareness and control.

Table 2 details opening and closing decisions through setting and situation. This compilation of responses stemmed from Item 1 on the questionnaire. Students were asked to "Think back to a time when you have been faced with a difficult choice or temptation...in a social setting. Describe the setting...and then describe the situation..."

Instructions with the initial instrument requested that students share a recent decision. The final questionnaire

called for the description of a situation which had occurred during the eight weeks of the study. It was interesting to note the consistencies that were a part of this social world with its decision-making requirements.

Table 2
Recent Decisions: Setting and Situation

Item number	% of responses:	
	Initial	Final
1. Settings:		
School	50%	30%
Mall or Public Place	18%	22%
Home	14%	30%
Friend's Home	14%	9%
School Bus		4%
Camp		4%
Situation Involved:		
Peers Interactions	41%	35%
Tobacco	21%	9%
Alcohol	11%	26%
Cheating	9%	4%
Shoplifting	7%	9%
Drugs	7%	4%
Family Conflict		9%
Sexual Participation		4%

Table 3 specifies the ways in which students approached these decision-making situations. Of particular interest was the fact that 100% of the students consulted an outside source when contemplating their final decisions. This strengthens the description of their enhanced agendas as offering more control, for they recognized that systematic decision making requires careful consideration and frequently, consultation.

Table 3
Approaches to Decision-Making Situations

Item Number	% of Responses	
	Initial	Final
1, 4, & 5: Referenced some aspect of a systematic approach to decision making	89%	93%
8. Who or What Consulted:		
Combination of Friends, Family, and Other Adults	46%	56%
Family Only, Including Siblings	25%	12%
No One	18%	
Peers Only	7%	20%
Adults Other Than Parents	4%	4%
Magazines, Books, Television		8%

Finally, Table 4 itemizes their responses regarding the advantages of reading. Instructions accompanying the initial questionnaire asked students to note the amount of daily time

spent engaged in pleasure reading. The final questionnaire asked that they consider time spent beyond the study's requirement of one novel read at home. Again, the responses proved interesting, particularly as they detailed the increased number of children who were reading up to 20 minutes per day, despite the additional requirements of the study.

Although students freely listed any number of minutes, categories are defined here for ease of comparison.

Table 4
Time Spent Pleasure Reading

Number of Minutes	% of Responses	
	Initial	Final
0	21%	17%
Up to 20	25%	42%
20 to 40	18%	8%
40 to 60	14%	17%
More than 60	9%	8%
Read, but Not Daily	9%	8%

These young adolescents shared their world in uninhibited and vibrant detail. Their descriptions served as the stage upon which a systematic approach to social decision making was set. Realistic fiction was then presented as a vehicle for understanding, implementing, and thus owning this approach. When the two were combined, these adolescents found that they

possessed an enhanced measure of control over their world with its demanding decisions. This is clarified through a description of their closing decision-making agendas.

**The Students' Closing Views of Decision Making
Based on Their Interactions With Realistic Fiction**

These students described a medley of situations and dilemmas, agendas and phases, strategies and struggles. They understood, in varying degrees, that social situations affect everyone, and that each person has the responsibility to both recognize and address them in a mature and controlled fashion.

Their Enhanced Decision-Making Agendas: A Discussion

One endorsement of this growing awareness was found in a comparison of the entire group's initial and closing questionnaires. Items 1, 4, and 5 were reviewed in order to assess student gains in the decision-making process. These results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Student Gains in the Decision-Making Process

Category	% of responses:	
	Initial	Final
Referenced some aspect of a systematic approach to decision making	89%	93%

Although the situations which the students chose to describe continued to focus on smoking, drinking, and the like, 93% of the students (as opposed to an initial 89%) discussed their closing decisions by referencing some component of a systematic decision-making process; such as, consequences, alternatives, consultation with a knowledgeable source, and/or the objective evaluation of the final decision in order to learn from it. It was the presence of one or more of these components which led to the response being logged as evidence of change in individual decision-making agendas.

A Categorical Analysis with Illustrations

A closer examination of questionnaire items 1, 4, and 5 led to the development of categories which accounted for consequences. These results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Group Comparison of Consequences as Evidence of Growth

Category	% of responses:	
	Initial	Final
Made a choice involving immediate gratification	40%	10%
Made a choice involving short-range consequences	44%	75%
Made a choice involving long-range consequences	8%	10%
Made a choice involving a mixture of short and long-range consequences	8%	5%

When reviewing these thought processes in terms of consequences (questionnaire Item 5), a noteworthy 10% made choices which resulted in immediate gratification, as opposed to the initial questionnaire's 40%. Gains were also apparent in the number of students who reported decisions resulting in short-range consequences, which possibly explains the heavy shift away from immediate gratification.

To illustrate these dynamics, seven students were selected for detailed analysis. Although selection was based primarily on questionnaire responses, their illustrations reflect a compilation of several data gathering instruments, such as, formal writings, journal responses, group discussions, and spontaneous writings. This presented a richer picture of their social agendas than would sole reliance on the often terse questionnaire replies.

Michael and Tom were students who exhibited growth away from a regular regard for immediate gratification. Phill represented the 7% who, in closing, still did not apply some aspect of a systematic approach to decision making.

Four additional illustrations follow Michael, Tom, and Phill. These represent students who became more cognizant of short and long-range consequences, as was evidenced from a comparison of their initial and closing questionnaires. Their final writing assignments are shared here in their entirety, illustrating this growth.

Treena discussed a situation which involved short-range consequences, as did Jennifer (up from an initial display of immediate gratification). Both Tonya and Danny described predicaments which included a consideration of long-range consequences as opposed to an initial situation involving short-range consequences. Danny's vignette also warned against the blind implementation of unquestioned advice.

Michael and Tom pull away from the need for immediate gratification. Phill does not.

Michael. As with many adolescents who practice immature decision-making habits, Michael seemed the type of child who responded to the moment in any way that would bring him instant satisfaction. This immediate gratification involved the acquisition of something that he wanted, which in some instances meant getting out of difficult situations with authority figures (an "I won" attitude). Considering the consequences of his decisions was not a habit.

This can be illustrated by charting his growth through his early and late journal entries, a spontaneous interview conducted by the researcher, and his second composition.

In his first week's journal, Michael wrote:

The other day my brother and I were play fighting. We were hitting each other back and forth, while my mother was talking on the phone. We kept on fighting even though she was on the phone. I decided to quit fighting but he hit me again, so then we got back in it.

A few minutes later she got off the phone and got real mad because we were fighting. I blamed it all on him and he got grounded.

His second composition underscored his lack of a process for decision making, which confirmed a proclivity toward immediate gratification rather than future regard. In reference to the book On My Honor, and its primary character, Michael wrote, "I think that Joel was like a real seventh-grade boy. He let other people make decisions for him sometimes. Also, he let stuff happen to him, like I do."

A later journal entry began to chart some element of growth and self-control concerning his choices. It also made a clear reference to long-range consequences. Michael wrote, "I am becoming more aware of the decisions I make. I think I will face a smoking situation. I won't smoke because I see what it is doing to my parents. About how it could kill me. I won't smoke."

When questioned about his entry by the researcher, he began to discuss what kind of parent he would be to his children. When he focused on role modeling, he affirmed his original reference to long-range consequences (cancer) by saying,

I will not drink and drive, take drugs, or say bad language around my kids. Don't want cancer, so I am not going to smoke. I would make a curfew around 10:00 p.m. I would let them buy what they wanted to. If they broke a rule I would take the television set away for a week.

Tom. Large for his age, quiet, quick to grin... Tom seemed disinterested in every aspect of school but his social life. He validated this thought in an early journal entry:

I'm going to go on out with the high school kids. I hope that I won't get in trouble if I get caught. I'll just go ahead and have a good time and if I get caught, I just get caught.

Tom was referenced earlier through his description of a situation involving tobacco products. In his portrayal of the incident, he noted that "I was hanging out with my friends and one of them took out a pack of Marlboros....They seen me not smoking....He said go ahead smoke it....I went ahead...and got hooked. Later I quit."

Just as Tom was observed to be social and prone to impulsive behaviors which led to a sense of immediate gratification, he also charted some evidence of growth. He noted in his journal in mid-May, "The character in my story didn't really make good decisions (I Know What You Did Last Summer). Julie...I didn't like the decisions she made in the story. She doesn't really make her own decisions. She goes with everybody else and that's a bad decision." A week later he adds, "I am getting more aware of my decisions."

His third writing was based on Izzy, Willy-Nilly:

If I was Izzy I would have called a friend and told them to come and get me. I wouldn't have rode home with a drunk person. I wouldn't have cared if they would have called me names. I would tell them to straighten up, and they could say what they want to.

Although Tom did not evidence great strides in his growth, he clearly exhibited an increased awareness of both inappropriate influences and consequences.

Phill. Phill's fourth writing assignment made interesting reading indeed. The assignment directed the students to write a narrative accounting of a social decision that a main character had to make. They were specifically asked to "Picture yourself in a social setting...faced with a decision of some type, either one that has happened to you or one which you think you may confront in the future."

Students were asked to assign fictitious names to the characters, but were instructed to respond to the situation as if they themselves were the primary decision makers. Phill's full story follows.

One night I was invited to an orgy party with my girlfriend. We didn't plan to do anything except hang out with some good friends. What was most tempting was to have a few drinks, you know, because we're not allowed to and it's not something you do everyday.

We arrived at the party and everybody outside the rooms with closed doors were having fun talking and dancing. I got together with my friends Don and Bill and we were ready to find something to drink, but not a soda.

Bill called me and Don to follow him, because of course, Bill knew where something to drink was. Ah, at last, a big glass of bottle of tequila right there in the fridge.

We all grabbed at it, but I got it first. I unscrewed the cap and I took about 5 gulps. After we finished up the bottle, I was making snow angels in the carpet, Don was hanging on the ceiling fan while it was moving, singing the theme song to "Superman," and Bill was bobbing for apples in the toilet. The next thing I know I'm lying in bed with puke all over me. When I recovered, I called Don and Bill and they were OK too, as well as my girl friend.

Phill's impulsive behavior and the story's situation itself supported his general attitude during much of this

study, and during much of the school year (as noted by Mrs. Timmons). This tendency toward impulsive behavior and the search for immediate gratification was underscored by the fact that Phill was the student whom Mrs. Timmons referenced with regard to selling condoms in the classroom.

His last journal entry was on the topic of sexual relationships. He concluded the lengthy account by noting that "...Another problem is teenagers having sex and getting a disease or having a baby at a young age." It seemed from other references, as well, that he was fully aware of the consequences of poor decision making; he simply chose to ignore them.

Treena and Janice describe decisions involving short-range consequences.

Treena's final writing assignment:

One evening on a Friday night I was going over to Katie's house for a sleep-over party. I thought it was going to be fun but when I got there her parents weren't home.

After a little while Katie went to the kitchen and brought back some rum and beer. We were all surprised! Then she gave all of us a cup and filled it with rum or beer. Everyone started drinking except me.

They asked me what was the matter and if I was chicken or not to try it. Then I told them I wasn't going to drink because I could get drunk and have a hangover. That is one thing I would never do.

The next day I went home and was just fine and everyone else went home throwing up and had a hangover.

Jennifer's final writing assignment:

One day my friends and me were all going to the store. We got back from the store, and then we went to the mill.

Megan lit up a cigarette, and she asked around to see if we wanted to take a part of the cigarette. My friend took a part of it. I didn't want to, but then Megan is a person who will tell anything. She has a lot of friends and I didn't, so I took a part of it. I liked it, so after that I sort of got hooked on them for about two to three weeks.

I did get caught smoking, and so did my friends. We got caught by Megan's brother, driving down the street. I had to make a big decision, and I wish I did not take a part of the cigarette. Up to this day I do not smoke. Megan still does.

Tonya and Danny describe a decision which involves long-range consequences. Danny also speaks to the importance of carefully scrutinizing advice.

Tonya's final writing assignment:

It was a very cloudy day in L.A. There were two people trying to influence a little kid to do drugs. The two teenagers' names were Lorenzo, who didn't make good grades in school and he was a trouble maker, and Gary. He was also a trouble maker and didn't make good grades either.

There was this one student that was smart, made good grades, and wore glasses. His name was Salvester. The problem was doing drugs to fit in with the bigger kids. Salvester wanted to be like the teenagers. In his mind he didn't want to do drugs, but he knew that they'd call him names. Salvester started thinking about consequences and his reputation, and how popular and cool he may become. He decided not to do it.

Then the next day in school they see him and start picking on him. So the decision is made. He feels good about himself, then again he feels bad about himself, because he gets picked on every single day. But Salvester still has his education, even if he doesn't have many friends.

I would have done the same thing Salvester did. Why ruin an education for drugs? I want the other kids who are ever in a situation like this To Just Say No!!!

Danny's final writing assignment:

It was 7:20 in the morning when Dave got on the bus. He was on his way to the high school. Dave was fourteen and in the 9th grade. He was an average student. He was on the JV basketball team. He was one of their best players. His best friend, Kevin, was also in the 9th grade and on the basketball team.

Their basketball coach and friend was Mr. Jimmy Perry. Dave could always go to him with problems. Mr. Perry always knew the right thing to do to solve his problems. So when Dave got to school he went to see Mr. Perry.

Mr. Perry was very happy to see him, but Mr. Perry knew something was wrong because of the expression on Dave's face. He asked him what was wrong and Dave said that last night his dad came home drunk and started to beat his mother and now his mom wants to get a divorce.

"I don't know what to do. I love them both and I want us to be one happy family," Dave said.

Mr. Perry said, "The only thing you can do is sit them down and try to work things out."

Dave was going to give it a try when he got home after the basketball game. The rest of the day went OK, but it was hard for him to keep his mind off what was going on at home.

It was now time for the ballgame. If they won they would get to go to the state championships. At the end the scoreboard read 87 to 81. "We won and we're on our way to the state championship!"

When Dave got home he got his parents together and they talked and worked things out. Dave couldn't believe it worked. He couldn't wait to thank Mr. Perry. When he got to school he ran as fast as he could to Mr. Perry's room. He told him the great news and Mr. Perry was so happy for him.

Mr. Perry needed to talk to Dave about their upcoming game against the rival team. He said, "They are a very strong and big team. So you are going to have to get stronger by the game, for us to have a chance to win."

Dave said that he would lift weights a lot. But Coach Perry said, "You will not be strong enough by then. I have an idea," he said. "I want you to take steroids."

Dave didn't really want to, but Mr. Perry said, "Trust me. It will pay off." And Dave did trust Mr. Perry.

He thought about what Mr. Perry did for his parents and he decided to take the steroids from Mr. Perry. He took them every day until the game. No one could believe

how strong he had gotten. People asked him and he just said he was working out a lot.

It was finally time for the big game. At half time it was tied at 53. Dave led both teams in scoring with 23 points. With 8 minutes and 31 seconds left, Dave collapsed in the middle of the court. He had died.

No one knew why or how. All 14,541 people were so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

After they did an autopsy, they found out his heart had just stopped from the steroids. Mr. Perry told everyone that it was him that gave Dave the steroids. All anyone could say was, "Why him? He was everybody's friend. He was a great student, and probably the next Michael Jordan or better."

David Bryan McAdams didn't get lucky and he won't get a second chance. Don't let this happen to you.
PLEASE!

Students Merge Realistic Fiction and Decision-Making

The DECIDE Model provided a vehicle for students to use when analyzing the decisions found within the stories introduced in class. (See Appendix G for this model.) It was therefore important for the students to frequently apply a personal understanding of this model to literature, in whatever way was appropriate for each individual's level of development.

This recurrent and effective application was viewed as important, ensuring both an understanding of a systematic approach to decision making and an internalizing of the steps involved. Only an intrinsic approach to a systematic model would lead students to an effective and spontaneous application of it later in personal life.

Two examples were copied as illustration. The first was a very direct application of the model to a class assignment;

the second was a more abstract description as it was initiated by one of the class discussion groups.

Jennifer's application of the model:

MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN
based on Izzy, Willy-Nilly

<u>IZZY</u>	<u>ME</u>
STEP 1: DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM	
Ride with Marco or not	Ride with a drunk boyfriend after a party
STEP 2: EXPLORE DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS	
A. Call a cab.	Same as Izzy's
B. Call your parents.	
C. Get another person.	
D. Call your friends to drive.	
E. Walk	
STEP 3: CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES	
FOR A: I might have no money.	Same as Izzy's
FOR B: They would get mad.	
FOR C: They might be drunk too.	
FOR D: They might not be home.	
FOR E: She might get raped or something.	
STEP 4: IDENTIFY THE BEST SOLUTION	
She rode with him.	I would have thought about calling my friends or parents.
STEP 5: DO IT	
She and they had a wreck.	It would have made me or him not be in a wreck.
STEP 6: EVALUATE YOUR DECISION	
It was a terrible decision.	It was a real good decision.

Danny's application of the model:

I read the book Slake's Limbo by Felice Holman. It is about a boy named Slake who runs away from home and decides to live in a New York subway. He and his parents don't get along well. He lived in the subway for 121 days. Then he finally went back home.

He acted like a punk. He never took a lot of time to think over his decisions. I act a lot different from him. I think things over a lot longer than Slake. For example, he decided to run away from home to the New York subway. I would have tried to work it out with my parents. He didn't have any kind of systematic approach for making a decision. I would have talked to my friends about it, and he just did it without consulting anyone. The way we make decisions is not similar.

Students' Reactions to Realistic Fiction

Positive reactions. As a part of their systematic approaches to decision-making, 24 of these 28 young adults (86%) stated in their May 25 journals that realistic fiction was an appropriate basis for consultation and contemplation when difficult social decisions arise. The following excerpts represent their acknowledgement.

I think literature has a lot to do with "Social Decisions." The books that we're reading have seemed so real. You can look back at the books and see that their decisions are very much like ours. If you ever have a problem or a decision to make, you can look back at the books if they are similar to yours.

--Melinda

You can learn from the mistakes these characters make in their decision.

--Scottie

I do like to use the good decisions out of books to help me make decisions. I would use it to make better decisions if I was in the same situation and the decision was good.

--Jessica

Some books have an effect on people. For example, if you are having trouble at home... Your parents are fussing at you every day. You decide you would run away. You could read a book of someone running away and quitting school. You will know what kind of future they got. You might see what would happen to you. That might of been a fiction book, but it could of been wrote just for you. They might change their minds and think more about what they were going to do.

For example, I kind of understand what Buff is going through in The Boy Who Drank Too Much. You want to impress your parents and do everything they want. It is very stressing to be expected to do perfect on everything. My parents expect me to make the honor roll. I have always made the B honor roll all my life and they expect me to do it now. This time I made the A. It wasn't no big deal to them. She said to keep it up. Also, I have a dad who drinks off and on. He don't hit me but he fusses a lot. My father has never laid a hand on me, even when I was small. Also about his mom. My mom isn't dead but it is just like she is. I haven't seen her in over 3 years even though she lives a few blocks away.

--Sara

I found out from reading about drinking and smoking what to do if you got hooked. I used to smoke and I read a book and it helped.

--Jennifer

You might have the same decision and it might help you out. If you read you might find the decision you are faced with in that book. And that might help you out.

--Buck

Books can help you decide better on the decisions that you make. People that decide in the books can help you decide better in life!

--Wallace

Yes! It can show the path the main character took to see what a good decision is.

--Sinthia

Negative reactions. It was interesting to note the reasons why four of these young adolescents (14%) did not agree with their classmates, and therefore why they did not find realistic fiction to be of value to them.

No, because I read only when I want to, and I don't like vocabulary words.

--Faith

I have been reading an article in Sports Illustrated about Chris Mullen that plays for the Golden State Warriors. He had a drinking problem, and it goes through the steps and times and exactly what he does when he wakes up in the morning until he goes to bed.

Well, I don't think it really makes a difference about myself making a social decision because when I make one sometimes I decide because of my friends, and sometimes for myself.

--Grant

The books I read in school don't affect the way my life goes. It may affect some of the other "students" in this class, but not me. It's not realistic to me. I don't see that stuff happening to me, but only on TV for me.

--Ray

I don't read a lot and the things I do read aren't serious and don't talk about big decisions.

--Martin

**How These Student Views Evolved:
Case Studies in Adolescent Decision Making**

From among this cadre of 28 diverse individuals, the researcher selected four students to detail this adolescent social world with its host of complexities and confusions. Their voices supplied clarity to the evolution of enhanced decision-making agendas; their honest, often emotional, conversations served as witness to emerging feelings of self-control; their frank discussions of literary characters elucidated the comfortable bond that they found within the pages of these books.

By sharing their collective voices, it is hoped that the reader can begin to understand "their basic human needs: caring relationships with adults, guidance in facing sometimes overwhelming biological and psychological changes, the security of belonging to constructive peer groups, and the perceptions of future opportunity" (Carnegie Council, p. 20).

Alan Thompson

A Descriptive Interpretation of His World

Alan was a quiet, reflective boy. At first glance he appeared a little obstinate, big for his 13 years, too anxious for constant attention in a low-key sort of way. His grades, conversations, and standardized test scores reported him to be

average across both curriculum and life's interests. A closer dialogue revealed a different young man.

He found an easy link between literature and life, although at one time he denied that books presented any real point of connection for him. Conversations concerning the characters offered a different picture, however, particularly in the first novel, Who Invited the Undertaker? He talked about it in this way:

This book, like I said, reminded me of my cousin and my uncle. He just got married about four months ago and while his mother had died he had to pay all the bills. And he had been living at my grandmother's house and he had extra chores to do which he wasn't used to. And it reminded me of that book. And my grandad made him clean up the house and mess like that. My uncle got mad at my grandad because he thought that he was working him too much. He went up to him and said, "Grandad, you're working my son too much. He's had someone to do it every since he was born, but he's had a change in his life because his mom died.

This story was clarified in later conversations, and it quickly became obvious that this topic dominated all of Alan's world. He explained in this way:

...my aunt (his cousin's mom) killed herself... She went to the store. She parked their blue pickup truck in the center back row of the shopping center. She closed up the truck as tight as she could. She sat there for a few minutes just thinking about what she was getting ready to do. She left the keys in the ignition. She pulled the trigger. My cousin and granddaddy got worried and went to the store. They found the truck...

Gene (his cousin) moved in with my grandmother. They lived there for 2 months. They had a fight and granddaddy told Gene to get out of his house. Since then he has moved (here) and got married to one of our

friends that goes to our church. He will not talk to them. He said he is waiting on them to make the first move.

He later continued through the revelation that "my birth mother got pregnant due to rape. Her husband was under the car at her office. He jumped out and raped her. The same day she put me up for adoption, she filed for a divorce."

Alan was mature beyond his years with the kind of broadened periphery that comes from difficult experiences. His attitude was positive and loving, and it was especially tender when he spoke of his adoptive parents. "I think I am really special to get a loving household. My parents must really love me to chose me out of all the thousands of kids waiting to be adopted. Just think, I could have easily been aborted." This depth of feeling followed Alan throughout the course of his year in seventh grade, and he constantly referenced his parents as sources of pride, understanding, and positive influence.

It was interesting to follow Alan's conversation in light of his personal decision-making agenda, the literature which he enjoyed, and the complex interweaving of family, peers, and school into it all. He often spoke just to the edge of detail, and on early occasion, he clearly contradicted himself as to his decision-making process. When merged, this made his growing awareness an engaging storyline to follow.

Alan Describes His Initial Decision-Making Agenda

I was sitting in the bleachers recently at a school dance. The music was loud and there were people all around. This girl's friends begged me and begged me to french kiss her. Finally they got on my nerves and I did it just to get them off my case! They expected me to do it and they pressured me and it worked. I decided to go ahead and kiss her just to get them off my back. But then I thought, "This isn't as bad as I thought it would be!"

Then she wouldn't give me her phone number. She wouldn't because she also did what her friends wanted her to do! If I could change it, I wouldn't have done it in the first place. I didn't choose the right thing to do.

Sometimes I don't really think about how to handle some of the situations that my friends and I get myself into. I guess I'll handle them when they hit me in the face!

I think, though, that I usually make good decisions. I think them through thoroughly and after I've thought it through good enough then I make my decision. So I would say the best thing to do when you have a decision to make is to think it through or talk to somebody about it.

Just last night I had a soccer game and I had kind of a bunch of homework to do and I kind of decided not to do it and so I arrived at the decision because I had too much to do, so I didn't do my homework. And I got a zero on it, too. But I was out all night last night. I was playing soccer and I had

scouts. I don't feel very good about it. I just don't feel good about it because I got a zero and when I get my progress report it will still show.

Alan Describes Adolescent Literary Characters

Dale in Who Invited the Undertaker? is a pretty typical seventh grader, because in our school, most people are divorced or have lost a parent. My cousin's mom died just last summer, and he reminds me of Dale a bunch. A lot of the people just in our class live with one parent, and are trying to get their parent a date or even finding a husband or wife.

One of his situations wasn't very typical, though. Not really. I think he has to be more the father of the family. My dad takes care of the bills and buys my clothes and stuff and he has to do that for himself.

Most of the time Dale makes good decisions, but sometimes they are not too good, because I would never put a "Love Ad" in the paper about my mom. That was a bad decision on his part because I wouldn't advertise my mom like that so that just anybody could come and call my house to say, "You want to go out?" A good decision was telling his mom about the mortgage payment that was due. She had to pay it because she needed to know about that or they'd lose their house.

In On My Honor I think Tony and Joel are very real to me. I think that all the people in the world will be faced with

that decision about death, maybe not with a person but with a pet or animal.

Joel and Tony have poor decision-making skills. If Tony had better decision-making skills he wouldn't have drowned, and Joel wouldn't have lied about how he died. I know I lie sometimes, but I also think the truth is the best way to go. Joel chooses to let other people make his decisions. He hasn't made any decisions on his own. Well, maybe he made one decision, to let his dad and Joel make his decisions.

In My Life in the 7th Grade the boy was failing algebra. His mom was proud of him except math. He was mischievous, clever, and persuasive. He should have told his mom earlier he was failing math and she could have helped him. People think their parents cannot help you do anything. They didn't learn the stuff in the old days.

Alan Integrates the DECIDE Model and Literature

Izzy in Izzy, Willy-Nilly made a very bad decision and I can see why. As a consequence of her decision she lost her right leg. I wouldn't have made the same decision. I have parents that are trusting, loving, and very protective. They would adore me if I were to call them and ask them to pick me up because there was drinking at this party. They would rather have a son safe and sound than a son with one leg and being laughed at and stared at. Even if you aren't a good decision maker that should have been an easy decision. I

would rather be laughed at because I called my parents than having one leg.

Marvin in My Life in the 7th Grade is a very outgoing person. He is sometimes a goof-off in class. He is a pretty good decision maker. I think I also make pretty good decisions most of the time.

Marvin was asked if he wanted some protection. He asked from what. The other boy said, "Do you want to have a good time? I can get you up with somebody." He said "NO!" I would have done the same thing! But he didn't use any kind of systematic approach to making his decision and I would have because I would have thought about the consequences if I got caught. He did what he thought was right and I would have done what I thought was right.

Alan Describes His Closing Decision-Making Agenda

Most of the time I make good decisions because I spend time thinking about them and talking to people about them. But sometimes I think I just let them happen.

As you already know my situation in my family right now. I decided to try to get my family back together. I called my uncle and grandparents on 3-way. I told them I don't really like having my family torn apart.

Granddaddy said, "I'm not ready to say I'm sorry."

I said, " Well, when will you be ready?"

He said, "NEVER!"

I asked him, "Why are you holding a grudge?"

My cousin said, "Why should I say I'm sorry when it wasn't my fault mom killed herself?" He just slammed down the phone.

I said, "I tried," and hung up.

I would tell other people to not let decisions happen to them and think it through hard and talk to somebody if you need to, like I talk to my parents. Stealing is a major decision that you can make or you can let your peers make that decision, but you have already messed up by letting them make that decision for you. You need to think of the consequences if you get caught. Your mom will get mad and you will probably lose some of their respect and privileges. Also, you can get in trouble with the law.

I have really enjoyed this study about decision making. I don't really like to read but I think this will get me back in the groove of reading again. In the elementary school I had read over 200 books. After fourth grade I have lost interest in reading. I like the way this is being handled. I wish we could change the curriculum. I'd go to the library now and ask for a book and read about the same situations and make a decision then.

Misty Smith

A Descriptive Interpretation of Her World

Considered both "well above average and highly motivated" by Mrs. Timmons, Misty was also a child with a hidden agenda. She appeared by all rights happy and content with her life, yet her father noted that she had been a constant discipline problem for each of her teachers in years passed.

One obvious source of conflict must have rested with someone with whom she was romantically involved, for a brief listing of four sources of major frustration for her revealed three which dealt with this relationship. Specifically, she shared these responses to the prompt, "Frustration is..."

1. I hate it when my friends talk bad about a guy I like.
2. When girls say my boyfriend was messing around with another girl and it isn't true.
3. My parents don't want me to date a guy just 'cause he's 19, but they don't even know him and they won't give him a chance.

She later continued her discussion of peers and parents and the way the two interact to influence an adolescent's decisions.

I think parents have some influence on what you do, but it's mostly out of fear that some kids respect their parents, afraid of what their parents might do. I think your friends have more influence on what you do than anyone else. 'Cause you want to do what your friends want you to do. But sometimes they take it too far so you have to know when to say "NO" and when to say "YES."

Misty has found that drinking, drugs, tobacco, sex, and with whom one should be friends are common social decisions that either she or her peers have experienced. She usually goes to a close friend for advice because "they don't always have the answers but they make me feel good about my decisions." Additionally, she noted that "I think the problems are about the same (in middle and high school). Drugs and sex are things that used to be found mainly in high school, but have started taking over middle schools." She felt certain that high school would add these additional decision-making situations to her social world:

1. Going out on a date with a guy that you know (or think) will try something.
2. Going to a party with people you don't know well.
3. Hanging out with the wrong crowd.

She adds that

I'm not the kind of person who wouldn't smoke, not as a habit, but I never have. I don't think ahead most of the time so I can't say that I won't do any of that stuff or that I will. I'm careless, some people say I'm conceited because I don't play the "ugly duckling" game like most girls, I don't really hang around the "good guys," and I don't really worry about stuff. I'm happy the way I am, and I don't really care about what anyone thinks about me but my friends.

This bent toward peers as opposed to all others became quite obvious as Misty described her relationships and the decisions which resulted from them. One constantly nurtured the impression that she was not one to let life happen to her.

With a flair for the dramatic and a social obsession with shock effect, this was a sophisticated and decision-aware young woman.

Misty Describes Her Initial Decision-Making Agenda

Once I was faced with a decision where a 19-year-old guy wanted to go out with me. He wanted to take me to the mall one Friday night. I knew my parents weren't about to let me go out with this guy, but I really wanted to. So I decided to tell my parents I was going with a friend. I had never really considered the consequences or what could happen. I just knew that I wanted to go and that was that. But as it turned out he couldn't find my house, and I'm glad I didn't go.

I was at the mall a few Fridays ago around 8:00. I had to decide whether or not to smoke and steal and drink. The guy I was with knew I wouldn't do any of those things, but he asked anyway. I was thinking about how I have problems breathing sometimes. And my teachers have told me that drinking kills cells in your brain and I don't want to do that. And I didn't want to get caught stealing. I realized that peer pressure doesn't bother me as much as I thought it would, and I'm happy with the decision that I made.

I think that I usually am pretty half and half about the decisions that I make. I had to make another pretty hard decision recently. I just sort of thought about what my parents would have wanted me to do and thought about what they

might do if they found out I'd done it and what my friends would think if I did it and what my friends would think if I didn't do it. Well, it was about the worst decision I've ever made. It just wasn't right. I got grounded for it.

Probably the most common decision that I have to make is who to date and who to be friends with 'cause they sort of guide you to do everything else.

Liberty and I have both been faced with a decision the past few days. One of our used-to-be friends started saying things about us and starting rumors about us, but no one believed what she said. We were very mad and were ready to fight her and we still are. But we made the decision not to because we didn't want to get suspended.

So instead we told an adult here at school who knew her, and he told us that this girl was having a lot of problems lately and that we should just forget it. But how easy is it to forget something like that? We really think that this adult, by not settling the matter, made a bad decision.

Misty Describes Adolescent Literary Characters

I think Dale in Who Invited the Undertaker? is a very realistic character because he has real feelings just like a real person. The things he did were those of a normal seventh grader. He thought through some of his decisions and some of them he didn't, like most seventh graders.

I think a lot of kids feel that they have to look after their parents because their parents will tell them something and not do it themselves. It's like those Pop Tarts commercials where the kids have to make their parents eat breakfast. I have to do that with my parents and so do a lot of kids.

I think Joel and Tony in On My Honor are pretty realistic characters, too. But the one thing I thought was very unrealistic was when Tony agreed to swim to the sand bar. I mean, if you've never taken swimming lessons and can't swim, you're not going to go swimming halfway across a river you shouldn't be in anyway unless you were on a death wish. It just doesn't happen; people have more common sense than that. Joel should have known that Tony would do anything so it didn't matter if they did it or not. Joel knew how dangerous it was, and he shouldn't have let his friend make his decision for him.

Last night I read I Know What You Did Last Summer and I think it's one of the best books I've ever read. It had so many decisions, good and bad, that had to be made. I could relate my decisions to some made in the book. And I think the characters were very realistic in that some made good decisions and some bad.

I also like Are You in the House Alone? It was just the way they had it set up and everything 'cause the guy, he got away with raping her and everything and I thought it was right

weird 'cause he didn't know that he had done anything wrong, 'cause he had always gotten his own way about everything and when she confronted him about what he had done, he didn't know he had done anything wrong. These characters had to deal with a lot of emotional problems. Like, after the girl got raped, you know, she had to go through a lot of stuff 'cause no one believed her that the guy had raped her 'cause he came from a rich family and everything.

Some of the books had problems like my friends and I have, and some didn't. One that did was Second Star to the Right where the girl loses too much weight and stuff. My friends are always trying to lose weight and you know, they are like starving themselves and everything. That's weird.

Izzy, Marco, and Tony in Izzy, Willy-Nilly were all very realistic characters because the things they did were things a real person might have done. The situations Izzy finds herself in are situations everyone's in at one time or another, no matter how protective their parents are.

Misty Integrates the DECIDE Model and Literature

If I was Izzy, I would have gone out with Marco, too. I would have considered all of the consequences when it was time to leave. And I would have thought about what my parents would do and say because I know I'm not supposed to get into a car with a driver that is intoxicated. I knew not to do that just out of common sense. So considering all the

choices, I would have told Marco we could stay a while longer because I know that my parents wouldn't care under the circumstances. Then after a while I would have just slipped out and gone to the nearest pay phone to call someone to come and get me. I think that would be a very good choice.

In I Know What You Did Last Summer the "bad guy," Collie, had to make one or two very big decisions like... What was he going to do now that he knows who killed his brother? and Was he going to kill them or just scare them or hurt them in some physical way? But I don't think he did it after hours of thinking. He just did it out of anger. I don't think I do stuff out of anger. I would just try to calm down and then try to figure out what to do about it.

Misty Describes Her Closing Decision-Making Agenda

I am becoming more aware of my decisions, situations, like having sex. Yes I'm going to do it, or no I'm not. I would think about my priorities and values. And what my friends would think and the way I was brought up. And what I wanted to do. Like I think when people are making sexual decisions, girls have a harder time of it because they have more to lose than guys. For guys it's cool to have sex, but for girls their friends usually look down on them for it. But with guys, their friends think that it's alright and there's nothing wrong with it.

My decisions are pretty half and half, good and bad. A lot of times you just sort of do something and a lot of times you'll just think about it and if you don't think about it a lot of times it will be a bad decision. I had to make a hard decision not too long ago. I thought about it and thought about all the consequences and what my friends would say and what my parents would think and what my parents would do if I get punished and everything.

If I knew someone in that same situation I would tell them to not let it happen to them. Just think about it real good. If you have already decided not to do something, then you'll have a better chance of not doing it.

I think literature can have an effect on the way you make decisions because if you read a book and the character makes a bad decision, you can find out what might happen as a result of that decision. And then if you're faced with a decision that's similar, you'll know sort of what you should do.

Larry Johnson

A Descriptive Interpretation of His World

Athletic and extremely attractive, Larry appeared to be the natural leader of Mrs. Timmons's students. The boys talked endless sports with him, and the girls found him irresistible.

Academically successful, he noted that reading was "OK, but I don't like doing vocabulary." He added that "I have been reading Sports Illustrated, got a subscription this Christmas. I got it because I love sports, especially basketball, not just for the Swimsuit Issue. I mean, I'm not saying I don't look at it. My parents edited it though."

An extremely attentive student, Larry came from a home which was both nurturing and protective, and where education was obviously prized. He was therefore somewhat sheltered in his relationships. His interactions with his peers, including topics of conversation, witnessed this lack of social sophistication. He was also encouraged to excel academically, and both his classroom grades and standardized test scores reflected this, as they were well above average.

Anyone who observed Larry would feel that this young man was content in every corner of his life. A closer look at his social world, however, revealed a child who was confused and unsophisticated, frustrated and doubtful. The following excerpts from his journal detailed this. They progressively chronicled a young man who was awakened to both the realities of relationship and the need for personal control.

Larry Describes His Decision-Making Agenda as It Progresses

May 4, 1992: *I heard that a girl wanted to date me. I knew what she was like, but didn't know if I should. I thought about it, and asked my friends what I should do.*

They said I should, and I came to the conclusion, yes. When I'm making decisions, I sometimes just go with the flow, like if I know it's not going to hurt anything.

May 6, 1992: This past week, last Friday, I started dating a girl. Because the day before she tapped me on the shoulder and I looked up and she kissed me. I mean, I could have timed it with a stop watch. The day after Friday she asked me to date her. I said yes because I didn't have to worry about her not liking me.

May 7, 1992: So far things have been good with my new girlfriend. I really like her, and she really likes me. I'm glad too. She is riding my bus today, but only to the high school.

May 8, 1992: I really like this girl I'm dating, and she likes me. Things are going very well. Today she is riding my bus again, this time to a friend's house.

May 14, 1992: My girlfriend is at the beach, and one of my friends called her friend and told her that she's been all over this guy down there. They wouldn't lie, either. I don't know really what to believe, but I'm going to break up with her.

May 15, 1992: Today I broke up with my girlfriend. It's fine with me. I mean, if she doesn't like me anymore, then I should have broken up with her.

I have heard some people say that another girl likes me in Mr. Petersen's class. I don't know. There are two girls

I like in the sixth grade, and I think they like me. I don't know. I just might not date anybody right now.

May 18, 1992: I have decided to spill my guts about what happened with me and the girl, Cindy. When I first saw her she was kissing her boyfriend on the bus, not me. When he got off the bus Cindy came and sat with me. I asked if her boyfriend was a good kisser. She said, "He's OK. How do you kiss?"

I said, "Yeah, you're really going to find out." A minute or two passed. She tapped me on the shoulder. I looked up and she kissed me. It shocked the crap out of me!

The next day she rode my bus again. She came and sat beside me, and asked me if I was going with someone. I said no, and she asked me to go with her. I said yes.

She rode the bus a couple of days later and we went to the back and kissed and all, but after she got off I heard some people saying that she was a wh_re. I really didn't think anything about it, but her own friends started saying things and it made me wonder. She rode the bus a few days later, and we were sitting pretty close and she put her hand on my leg and then tried to put her hand down my pants!!! I didn't know what to think. I didn't let her put her hands down there.

I am beginning to not like her. She said she loved me, and on the beach she started putting her hands down another guy's pants, and he didn't care. Yeah, she loves me, NOT!

I have decided to make better decisions, and try to find out about what I'm going to choose, and how I treat people. She was probably going to want us to have sex. People say that they want to have sex, but not this young. I need to be more careful! Girls don't take NO for an answer.

May 27, 1992: Yesterday I asked Sherry to date me during 6th period. She was smiling like she was going to say yes, but she didn't. It really pissed me off. She said she liked someone else. Why am I having so much trouble with girls??

May 28, 1992: My friends influence my life and my actions very much. For example, I bet that I asked my friends things like, should I do this, or should I do that, at least a million times a day.

Larry Describes Adolescent Literary Characters

I think Ivy Ruckman did a good job portraying a seventh grader in Who Invited the Undertaker?. For example, the way she wrote about Dale and the way he hangs around with his friends and talks about girls is good. He worries about if people are going to like him, and if he wears the right clothes, and if a certain girl likes him. I think that is pretty normal.

But in On My Honor, Joel should not just go along with Tony. Joel is a poor decision-maker. They don't have a good relationship. At first I thought Joel and Tony were unrealistic, but after awhile I thought it was realistic,

especially the way he coped with the death. They were also realistic in the way they challenged each other. I really don't know of anyone stupid enough to go swimming in a river, if they can't swim, though. In some ways it's believable, and in others it is not.

In The Moves Make the Man there was a little bit of racism. I shouldn't say that, but he was in an all-white school and I'm sure he didn't feel very comfortable. This is not the same type of problem I deal with.

Larry Integrates the DECIDE Model and Literature

MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN by Larry Johnson
based on Cynthia Voigt's Izzy, Willy-Nilly

STEP 1: DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM

Going home with someone drunk

STEP 2: EXPLORE DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

- A. *Call parents*
- B. *Tony drive*
- C. *Drive him home*
- D. *Call a taxi*
- E. *Marco drive*

STEP 3: CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

- For A: *Get home safely*
- For B: *Get to know Tony better*
- For C: *Get a ticket (no license)*
- For D: *Get home safely*
- For E: *Possible wreck*

STEP 4: IDENTIFY THE BEST SOLUTION

Larry: A. Call her parents

STEP 5: DO IT

Izzy: E. She let Marco drive her home.

STEP 6: EVALUATE YOUR DECISION*Terrible decision, lost leg*

First of all, my parents would make me go home at least by 12:00. My parents trust me and all, they just don't want someone else doing something to me. If someone was drinking alcohol and they asked me to ride with them, I would not ever ride home with a drunk person. My parents told me that if something happened like that to call them and they would pick me up. Or I could call a taxi, but don't drive home with a drunk driver.

Talking about this assignment in a group was pretty easy 'cause everybody knows what they're supposed to do, wrong and right.

Liberty Layton**A Descriptive Interpretation of Her World**

Giggly, outspoken, effervescent, a social butterfly... Liberty seemed a textbook definition for the word cute. She noted that among her greatest sources of frustration were such horrors as "running out of hairspray, forgetting your gym clothes, getting grounded off the phone," and "when you can't find anything to wear." She was not, however, the carefree person that this facade mirrored.

She cited skipping class, running away from home, taking drugs that were offered to you, and smoking in bathrooms as the most common social decisions that she and her friends faced. She recounted a serious example from her high school sister's conversation of the night before:

Last night my sister told me that one of her friends was talking about taking acid and asked Toby if she would be there with her. She decided to just forget that the girl ever came up to her.

An above average reader as far as tests scores reveal, Liberty noted that she'd rather "be read to, but if the book is really interesting, I will read it. But honestly, I don't read at all except for magazines." She said that "true stories about kids my age" were her favorite reading materials, but that they won't factor into her summer leisure at all; "I have too many camps to go to."

Mrs. Timmons echoed this conflicting undertow to Liberty's public and private agendas. "She's one child that I just never seemed to get a handle on. She always acted happy and content, but you knew that when your back was turned, she was probably a different person. She really played the game well."

Liberty seemed more in tune with the peer group than any of the other three students who shared their reflections here. Being a part of the popular crowd was indeed of paramount importance, and it made one wonder where, and if, she drew a

line between self and friends. For example, she wrote in an early journal entry that

A lot of kids today are pressured into smoking when they are with their friends. They have to decide fast and right there. I think most of the time kids make the decisions that their friends would want them to make, and not really think about the consequences.

She discussed how heavily she weighs consequences against decisions in these remarks from her initial interview:

Interviewer: Do you make good decisions?

Liberty: I think most of the time I make pretty good decisions.

Interviewer: Explain why you think you make good decisions.

Liberty: Because I don't get in very deep trouble most of the time.

Interviewer: Oh, so you are basing it on getting caught or not?

Liberty: Yeah.

One quickly realized that, like so many of her classmates, Liberty made many of her decisions with an eye turned primarily to immediate gratification, and on occasion, short or long-range consequences. A fluent writer and articulate conversationalist, she often colored her decision-making processes with detailed examples.

Liberty Describes Her Initial Decision-Making Agenda

Today's decision making for teenagers is much more difficult than it was for our parents. We have to decide from going to school through having a relationship. For example:

I was invited to a party at my friend's house. When I got to her house, one of my wild next door neighbors was there. At the time I didn't know she was an alcoholic, and when I found out, I was very shocked.

After about an hour into the party this girl starts going through my friend's cabinets and pulled out some vodka. After pouring the drink into everyone's glass, she finally got to mine. I had to force myself to say no. I think it was so hard to say no because I wanted to see what it would taste like and experiment. I have always wondered what it tasted like, but I was scared and excited at the same time. I will never regret my decision I made.

After I made this decision I felt good about myself but also I felt bad too because I was sitting there watching my friends turn into future alcoholics. I made the decision not to drink because I thought about how I would look drunk and didn't like it.

Most of the time I have to make my decisions right away, but when I don't, usually I talk to my best friend about it first. I think most of the time I make pretty good decisions because I don't get in very deep trouble most of the time.

Liberty Describes Adolescent Literary Characters

I thought the character named Dale in Who Invited the Undertaker was very interesting. Some of the things he got into were funny, but he tried to think that he was the one

that managed the family. He needed to slow down and live his life, not act like he was an adult. He's not giving himself time to grow up.

Ivy Ruckman did a wonderful job on making Dale a "real" person. Just the way she put her words in sentences made you picture in your mind what he was doing and how he said stuff. Another way I thought she made him real was because a lot of families today have a single parent. But I don't think that many teenagers would think that they had all of the responsibility.

I also liked A Day No Pigs Would Die. I live on a farm and this story takes place on a farm. The boy in the story reminds me of myself because I love to get in trouble and so does he. But he is responsible, active, and loves to help.

I think the author of On My Honor did a wonderful job on making the characters seem realistic, too. Just the decisions are much like the youth of today. For example, when they choose to go swimming any kid would want to go swimming on a hot day.

Sometimes I want to make daring decisions like this one. Everyone wants to try something new and daring once in a while.

Liberty Integrates the DECIDE Model and Literature

MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN by Liberty Layton
based on Cynthia Voigt's Izzy, Willy-Nilly

STEP 1: DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM

Izzy and Marco went to a party. Marco got drunk. In the end they got in a car accident.

STEP 2: EXPLORE DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

- A. *She could have called a cab.*
- B. *Could have called her parents.*
- C. *Tony could have taken her home.*
- D. *She could have called a friend or relative to come get her.*
- E. *Called the police.*

STEP 3: CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

- FOR A: *She might not have money.*
- FOR B: *They might not let her go to any more parties.*
- FOR C: *He might try something.*
- FOR D: *They might get mad that she went to the party.*
- FOR E: *They would have stopped the party and arrested Marco.*

STEP 4: IDENTIFY THE BEST SOLUTION

Liberty: Call her parents.

STEP 5: DO IT

Izzy: Went with Marco

STEP 6: EVALUATE YOUR DECISION

Bad!

I don't think Izzy made a very good decision. If she had gone and thought about what might happen if she would ride with Marco, maybe she wouldn't have gone.

If I were in the same situation I think that I would have been scared to drive with a drunk, because I don't want to die young. If I couldn't get another ride with someone that wasn't drunk, I would have called my parents. Even if I was

going to get in trouble, I'd rather get grounded for the rest of my life than die for a bad decision I made.

I thought these characters were "real." They faced the same peer pressure and problems that teenagers of today face.

Liberty Describes Her Closing Decision-Making Agenda

In the book Second Star to the Right, Leslie is a very smart, outgoing person but has some problems with her self-esteem. She's always saying she is fat and ugly, but she is nice and likes having fun. I think I am a little bit like her. A couple of weeks ago, before you came, I was the same but I didn't eat anything. Sometimes I make bad decisions but this was the worst.

Leslie got that way because she kept on looking in the mirror and saying to herself, "If only I were skinny." And finally she went to a party and met this guy. He was short and skinny. So she avoided him at first, but then after two months, she got the flu and lost five pounds and that was how it started.

I think she made bad decisions. But she might have made good decisions according to her. She didn't know what she was doing. I think she just let it happen.

I would probably have told my parents. First I would have thought about how I look right now. Second I would see if I'm happy. Third, I would see if I would hurt anyone. Fourth, I would make my decision. I'm different from her

because I made the effort to see if I would hurt anyone and she didn't.

I actually make good and bad decisions. Sometimes I do things that I get in trouble for and sometimes I do stuff for other people and for other reasons.

There was a time at the last dance that a couple of people were smoking and they asked me if I wanted to smoke a cigarette. I said no because I had tried one before and didn't like it. I thought I made a pretty good decision. I was very comfortable with it, because if I had done it, it would have proved that I didn't think very much of myself and let them control my life. I'd tell other teenagers to think about the future and don't let your friends control your life. I've learned to take my time next time I make a decision.

Alan, Misty, Larry, and Liberty

Speaking candidly and clearly, each of these four adolescents described life from a unique perspective.

Alan's world was colored by a slow awakening to reality, and the resulting understanding that he was left to bear the consequences of others' difficult decisions. His aunt's suicide, his grandfather and cousin's discontent, his birth mother's rape... When these decisions were combined, they left in their wake a young boy who was socially frightened and in desperate need of reassurance, from both the adults who enfolded him and the peers who dominated his world. His

salvation rested in his home, which was stable, protective, and secure; his ambivalence came from realizing that he was well along the path to adulthood, and that he would soon be expected to leave this security behind, at least in part.

In contrast, Misty rarely mentioned her homelife, except to point out such things as "...it's mostly out of fear that some kids respect their parents, afraid of what their parents might do." Socially mature and quite conscious of her decision-making prowess, Misty herself dominated her world. "I don't play the 'ugly duckling' game like most girls, I don't really hang around the 'good guys,' and I don't really worry about stuff. I'm happy the way I am..." She enjoyed, and nurtured, the dramatic.

Like Alan, Larry harbored some shreds of social insecurities, yet in contrast, he rarely allowed them to surface in a peer setting. He was outwardly suave and controlled. Eager to please, he gave the impression that he knew the rules of the game and was anxious to play it to adult satisfaction, perhaps because he recognized that he was, in reality, a boy dressed in a man's suit.

Liberty was very aware of her social station and initially equated one's level of success with one's level of popularity. She was a puzzling child, and it was quickly apparent that she was sometimes unhappy with herself. These feelings of confusion and malcontent seemed to ride just under

the surface, but began to quickly dissipate as she reached new levels of social awareness and maturity.

The effect that this elevated level of awareness and control had on these young adolescents was best described through a comparative look at each student's decision-making agenda, initially and in closing.

Their Decision-Making Agendas: A Discussion

Alan's Decision-Making Agenda

Initially. Alan's initial description included a situation where a group of peers were urging him to kiss a girl at a school dance. In his description he used explanations like, "I decided to go ahead and kiss her just to get them off my back," and "Sometimes I don't really think about how to handle some of the situations that my friends and I get myself into. I guess I'll handle them when they hit me in the face!" He later referenced a decision to ignore his homework in favor of scouts and a soccer game.

In contrast, however, he specifically described his decision-making agenda in an almost methodical fashion:

I think them through thoroughly and after I've thought it through good enough then I make my decision. So I would say the best thing to do when you have a decision to make is to think it through and talk to somebody about it.

This contradiction suggested that Alan was aware of a systematic approach to mature decision making, but that he did not actually practice one. That thought is underscored in his initial frustrations about a lack of control in his life, particularly concerning his cousin and grandfather's quarrel.

He displayed tendencies toward immediate gratification (skipping his homework) which resulted in a later recognition of short-range consequences ("...I got a zero and when I get my progress report it will still show.") He did not seem to think any further, however, than this desire for immediate gratification or occasionally, short-range consequences.

In closing. Alan noted that now he generally makes "...good decisions because I spend time thinking about them and talking to people about them." In the same breath, however, he confessed "But sometimes I think I just let them happen."

He evidenced some degree of growth in his decision-making agenda when he cautioned that one should "not let decisions happen...think it through hard and talk to somebody if you need to..." Also, "You need to think of the consequences." This growth was observed in his illustration which focused on stealing. This incident displayed a recognition of short-range consequences, with immediate gratification erased from the scenario. Some growth was therefore noted.

An increase in his conscious level of self-control was exhibited in his decision to telephone his extended family so

that he might attempt to mediate a resolution to their conflict.

He also referenced a sense of transfer between realistic fiction and his own decision-making agenda when he said, "I wish we could change the curriculum. I'd go to the library now and ask for a book and read about the same situations and make a decision then." This sense of transfer was perhaps initially spawned by the characters of Dale (Who Invited the Undertaker?) and Tony (On My Honor). It was Dale's self-appointed position as man of the house, and Tony's death, that seemed to open Alan's Pandora's box of emotional outpourings.

Misty's Decision-Making Agenda

Initially. Misty introduced herself by mentioning a 19-year-old who had asked her for a date. Knowing that her parents would not approve of him, she "decided to tell my parents I was going with a friend." This conscious decision to lie became even more noteworthy after one realized that Misty had a clearly established decision-making process which was already in place, and which allowed for both a perusal of consequences and a consideration of others.

For example, an accounting of consequences was apparent when she referenced a decision concerning smoking, stealing and drinking with a peer. She explained, "I was thinking about how I have problems breathing sometimes. And my teachers have told me that drinking kills cells in your brain

and I don't want to do that. And I didn't want to get caught stealing."

In another instance it was inferred that she went against her parents' wishes because, after considering what both they and her friends would want and would think, she recalled that "it was about the worst decision I've ever made. It just wasn't right. I got grounded for it." Misty's friends were apparently more influential than her parents, and they remained that way throughout the study.

This particular decision also led one to realize that immediate gratification was important to Misty, and that it was probably more powerful than short or long-range consequences, including parental punishment. This held true with her decision to lie to her parents about her date with a 19-year-old when she said, "I never really considered the consequences or what could happen" (although she was obviously aware of a mature decision-making process). "I just knew that I wanted to go and that was that."

In keeping with this established process, however, Misty was aware of both short and long-range consequences, an acknowledgement that put her in a realm of social sophistication that was atypical of her classmates. She described a mixture of consequences when she considered smoking, drinking, and shoplifting at the mall (problems breathing, drinking kills brain cells, and getting caught stealing). A consideration of short-range consequences was

also evident when she and Liberty considered fighting a girl with whom they had a disagreement. However, "we made the decision not to because we didn't want to get suspended."

A sense of transfer was evident in this latter example, as well. She and Liberty sought the advice of an adult in the school concerning this fight. She noted, "We really think that this adult, by not settling the matter, made a bad decision."

In closing. Because of Misty's initial awareness of appropriate decision-making processes, she exhibited little change in her systematic approach. There was a marked difference in her level of awareness concerning consequences, choice, and integrity, however. For example, she noted that "I am becoming more aware of my decisions, situations, like having sex....I would think about my priorities and values. And what my friends would think and the way I was brought up."

In continuing, she exhibited a broadened sense of social consciousness and fairness, and a questioning of the stereotypical roles that are often imposed by society:

Like I think when people are making sexual decisions, girls have a harder time of it because they have more to lose than guys. For guys it's cool to have sex, but for girls their friends usually look down on them for it. But with guys, their friends think it's alright and there's nothing wrong with it.

In illustration of this broadened sense of consciousness, she noted on a personal level that "...if you don't think

about it a lot of times it will be a bad decision..." and "I thought about it and thought about all the consequences..." Finally, "If you have already decided not to do something, then you'll have a better chance of not doing it." Thus she found that projecting herself into future decision-making situations was beneficial.

An avid reader, it was not surprising to find this evidence of transfer continuing through her appreciation of literature as a medium which

can have an effect on the way you make decisions because if you read a book and the character makes a bad decision, you can find out what might happen as a result of that decision. And then if you're faced with a decision that's similar, you'll know sort of what you should do.

Larry's Decision-Making Agenda

Initially. Larry was extremely cognizant of his peer group, and he encouraged them to dominate the majority of his important decisions. He opened his story of Cindy (the girl who "tried to put her hand down my pants!!!") by referencing this peer group. He clearly stated that he "knew what she was like, but didn't know what I should do." He consulted his friends who told him that he should date her; therefore he did. "They said I should, and I came to the conclusion, yes." He added that "I also sometimes just go with the flow..."

As he continued his story, he included the fact that Cindy was at the beach, and that his friends told him

"...she's been all over this guy down there." Further, he added, "They wouldn't lie, either. I don't know really what to believe, but I'm going to break up with her."

Larry's rule of thumb seemed to be that he should not confront or ask (as in more mature situations). Rather, he should simply trust his friends and follow their advice without questioning their judgment or acknowledging that each story has an opposing perspective. He did not exhibit any sense of a decision-making process at all; rather, he relied on his friends to supply theirs according to the requirements of his social life.

In closing. Larry firmly stated, "I've decided to make better decisions, and try to find out about what I'm going to choose, and how I treat people." There was, however, little evidence of this conviction in application, although it may indeed have been a new resolution for Larry. The seeds will perhaps sprout over the summer months.

One witness to the fact that he still did not implement a systematic process in his own life came during a small group discussion of the novel Izzy, Willy-Nilly. He contributed frequently to the conversation, yet other members often discussed his suggestions and then rejected them for more agreeable solutions. It was clear that a systematic process was new to him.

Although he was successful in completing a DECISION-MAKING PLAN on this and several occasions, he actually

exhibited no transfer of a systematic approach into his own life. He never discussed consequences or generated alternatives, as was evidenced through the earlier issue of Cindy's alleged infidelity. His friends said date her; he did. His friends said she was unfaithful; she was.

Instead, he ended his journal as he began it. He wrote, "My friends influence my life and my actions very much. For example, I bet that I ask my friends things like, should I do this, or should I do that, at least a million times a day." Again, he concluded as he started: strongly influenced by his peers, unsteady in his decision-making processes, and exhibiting little evidence of personal commitment or appropriate measures of confrontation.

This latter thought was clearly illustrated during the course of his participation in this study. Larry chose to discuss a situation involving race relations in his opening questionnaire. He referenced that "...a bunch of white people are making a group against blacks." (Mrs. Timmons had noted earlier that this was becoming a concern among the teachers at this school.) When approached about joining the white group, Larry explained that they expected him "to go along because I'm white." However, he felt "like I should do what I want. I might tell Mrs. Timmons," but he said that he had not yet decided if he was going to do so (and indeed he never did).

The entire situation seemed to make him angry, and he wanted to change "the whole black-white thing. Why can't

people accept that there are other races that are good?" Yet he never confronted the issue.

In his exit interview eight weeks later, he contradicted his involvement in the situation, almost as if he were denying that he ever faced the opportunity to state his personal convictions about "the whole black-white thing." He chose to read and discuss a book entitled The Moves Make the Man, which also deals with racial issues. Concerning this book, Larry noted that "...there was a little bit of racism. I shouldn't say that, but he (Jayfox) was in an all-white school and I'm sure he didn't feel very comfortable." When the interviewer asked, "Was this the same type of problem you deal with?" he bluntly answered, "No," and went on to the next question without elaboration.

He therefore avoided addressing an issue that was, at least at one time, a source of genuine concern for him. However, his closing conviction was firm, "I've decided to make better decisions, and try to find out about what I'm going to choose, and how I treat people." Perhaps the summer will nurture that.

Liberty's Decision-Making Agenda

Initially. Liberty opened her description with "today's decision making for teenagers is much more difficult than it was for our parents." This awareness of decision-making as a global process was indicative of Liberty's level of maturity.

Like her friend Misty, Liberty was interested in immediate gratification, yet exhibited an awareness of both short and long-range consequences. However, she did not demonstrate the initial employment of a decision-making process.

One example of her recognition of short-range consequences was found in the vodka that was passed around at her friend's party.

I think it was so hard to say no because I wanted to see what it would taste like and experiment....I was scared and excited at the same time....I made the decision not to drink because I thought about how I would look drunk and didn't like it.

Another came in her transferring the characters from Bauer's On My Honor into her own life. She said, almost wistfully, "Sometimes I want to make daring decisions like this one" (to swim in a raging river). "Everyone wants to try something new and daring once in a while."

An example of long-range consequences was found in her recognition that "...I felt bad too because I was sitting there watching my friends turn into future alcoholics."

She seemed to constantly evaluate the decisions which she made, and was quite comfortable with them. Her evaluation did, however, include the notation that "I think...I make pretty good decisions because I don't get in very deep trouble most of the time."

In closing. Liberty clearly displayed a healthy degree of growth in her decision-making agenda, as well as evidence of the transfer of print into life.

Her exit interview, group discussion protocol, and closing journal entries all focused on Leslie, an anorexic character from Second Star to the Right, and one with whom Liberty strongly identified. Apparently concerned about her own eating habits, she noted, "I think I am a little bit like her. A couple of weeks ago, before you came, I was the same but I didn't eat anything (as opposed to Leslie's two tablespoons of cottage cheese a day). Sometimes I make bad decisions, but this was the worst." In continuing, she noted that Leslie "didn't know what she was doing. I think she just let it happen."

In contrasting her own approach, she detailed a type of systematic look at decision making, an approach that was clearly not present in earlier conversations.

I would probably have told my parents (about an eating disorder). First I would have thought about how I look right now. Second I would see if I'm happy. Third, I would see if I would hurt anyone. Fourth, I would make my decision. I'm different from her because I made the effort to see if I would hurt anyone and she didn't.

Liberty's process included thinking the situation through, considering the short and long-range consequences, and then evaluating what was decided. This was again confirmed in her closing description of the school dance where she was offered a cigarette. She recounted the incident in this way:

I thought I made a pretty good decision. I was very comfortable with it, because if I had done it, it would have proved that I didn't think very much of myself and let them control my life. I'd tell other teenagers to think about the future and don't let your friends control your life. I've learned to take my time next time I make a decision.

Their Literary Connections: A Discussion

These adolescents described both their social world and the decision-making approaches that they employed in response to its demands. From this description, realistic fiction surfaced as a notable influence on these four young adults. It did, however, carry less credibility with Larry, who continued to emphasize the importance of his immediate peer circle over that which was comprised of adolescent characters.

Three patterns for discussion arose from their conversations about these literary peers. These patterns served to underscore both the students' levels of involvement with realistic fiction, and the growth in decision-making skills that resulted. These three included:

1. Three of the four compared themselves to characters on a regular basis;
2. Three of the four practiced a degree of cognitive dissonance in that they found a character's decision puzzling and questioned the reasoning behind it; and
3. Each of the four regularly evaluated the decision-making skills of their literary peers.

Comparing Self to Characters

Alan, Liberty, and Misty made powerful connections with both the characters and the circumstances that were portrayed within the literature read. The most commanding examples of these connections came through Alan and Liberty. Four of the novels seemed to open a Pandora's Box for them, as the two plunged into often unsolicited, and always truthful, comparisons of self and characters. Misty's social sophistication and self-assurance may have inhibited her private side, and Larry, immersed in his own set of circumstances, rarely observed the literary peer circle.

Alan. Alan's tumultuous feelings concerning his extended family surfaced immediately in his initial interview. In discussing the character of Dale in Who Invited the Undertaker?, he explained that

This book, like I said, reminded me of my cousin and my uncle. He just got married about four months ago and while his mother had died he had to pay all the bills. And he had been living at my grandmother's house and he had extra chores to do which he wasn't used to. And it reminded me of that book. And my grandad made him clean up the house and mess like that. My uncle got mad at my grandad because he thought that he was working him too much. He went up to him and said, "Grandad, you're working my son too much. He's had someone to do it every since he was born, but he's had a change in his life because his mom died.

Clarification of the circumstances surrounding his aunt's death came during the reading of the second novel, On My Honor, when Alan privately offered that his aunt had committed

suicide. He compared himself to Joel and Tony when he said, among other things, that "I think all the people in the world will be faced with that decision about death..." He later discussed the fact that Joel had lied to his parents, and he noted that "I know I lie sometimes, but I also think the truth is the best way to go."

Liberty. Liberty, too, shared the results of some private introspection stemming directly from Hautzig's Second Star to the Right. In the written portion of her group discussion, she said that

...Leslie is a very smart, outgoing person but has some problems with her self-esteem. She's always saying she is fat and ugly, but she is nice and likes having fun. I think I am a little bit like her. A couple of weeks ago, before you came, I was the same but I didn't eat anything. Sometimes I make bad decisions but this was the worst.

She also wrote about the characters in A Day No Pigs Would Die and On My Honor. This seemed almost a reflection of the conflicting undertow that was so apparent between her public facade and private life.

In the first comparison she wrote that "the boy in the story reminds me of myself because I love to get in trouble and so does he. But he is responsible, active, and loves to help." Again, one is reminded of her own private attitude (the dare-devil who often tries trouble) and her public life (responsible, active, helpful). In the second comparison she echoed this with the confession that "sometimes I want to make

daring decisions like this one. Everyone wants to try something new and daring once in a while."

Misty. Further evidence of Misty's control over her immediate world came through a discussion of Who Invited the Undertaker? Like Dale, she referenced having to take care of her parents at times. She wrote in an early journal entry:

I think Dale...is a very realistic character because he has real feelings just like a real person. The things he did were those of a normal seventh grader. He thought through some of his decisions and some of them he didn't, like most seventh graders.

I think a lot of kids feel that they have to look after their parents because their parents will tell them something and not do it themselves. It's like those Pop Tart commercials where the kids have to make their parents eat breakfast. I have to do that with my parents and so do a lot of kids.

She returns to parental referencing through the character of Izzy, the girl whose ride home with a drunken date ended in tragedy.

Izzy, Marco, and Tony...were all very realistic characters because the things they did were things a real person might have done. The situations Izzy finds herself in are situations everyone's in at one time or another, no matter how protective their parents are.

If I was Izzy, I would have gone out with Marco, too. I would have considered all of the consequences when it was time to leave. And I would have thought about what my parents would do and say because I know I'm not supposed to get into a car with a driver that is intoxicated. I knew not to do that just out of common sense. So considering all the choices, I would have told Marco we could stay a while longer because I know that my parents wouldn't care under the circumstances. Then after a while I would have just slipped out and gone to the nearest pay phone to call someone to come and get me. I think that would be a very good choice.

One is reminded of the situation Misty described when she mentioned dating a 19-year-old of whom her parents openly disapproved. Because of this disapproval, she "decided to tell my parents I was going with a friend." Her discussion of Izzy begins with a mention of parental protection as something that cannot always be depended upon, yet it ends with her falling back upon this same protection as something that she both needs and respects.

Cognitive Dissonance

Misty openly expressed confusion as to the decisions that specific characters made, and both Liberty and Larry to a much lesser degree echoed this confusion. Their contemplation and questioning demonstrated a real progression to a more objective level of decision making and to a more developed level of literary empathy. Although Alan, too, exhibited some growth toward a planned approach to decision making, he never progressed from a questioning of family decisions into a questioning of the less immediate problems posed by the books. Perhaps his life was simply too filled with more confusing dilemmas and situations.

Misty. The most obvious example of this contemplation comes through Misty, who interacted heavily with a book by Richard Peck, Are You in the House Alone? The very nature of the plot required an advanced degree of emotional sophistication from the reader, for in this book the main

character was raped by her best friend's boyfriend. In her closing interview, Misty discussed the fact that the aftermath was unjust, and that she could not sort through why the characters acted as they did.

It was just the way they had it set up and everything 'cause the guy, he got away with raping her and everything and I thought it was right weird 'cause he didn't know that he had done anything wrong, 'cause he had always gotten his own way about everything and when she confronted him about what he had done, he didn't know he had done anything wrong. These characters had to deal with a lot of emotional problems. Like, after the girl got raped, you know, she had to go through a lot of stuff 'cause no one believed her that the guy had raped her 'cause he came from a rich family and everything.

She also referenced her friends in this same tone of voice in regards to another book. Like Liberty, she found Second Star to the Right to be relevant to her life, but her point of relevancy came through her peer circle. One wonders if she was perhaps thinking of Liberty when she continued her conversation through Leslie, a character who was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.

Some of the books had problems like my friends and I have, and some didn't. One that did was Second Star to the Right where the girl loses too much weight and

you know, they are like starving themselves and everything. That's weird.

Liberty. Liberty mentioned the character of Dale on a number of occasions. Found in Ruckman's Who Invited the Undertaker?, he declared himself man about the house because

his dad had died two years earlier. Liberty could not quite understand why he felt obligated to take on a responsibility that belonged solely to his mother, and she scolded him for his decision to do so.

I thought the character named Dale...was very interesting. Some of the things he got into were funny, but he tried to think that he was the one that managed the family. He needed to slow down and live his life, not act like he was an adult. He's not giving himself time to grow up.

Larry. Finally, Larry agreed with his classmates when he questioned Joel's and Tony's joint decision to swim in an unpredictable river: "I really don't know of anyone stupid enough to go swimming in a river, if they can't swim..."

Evaluation of the Characters' Decisions

Each of these four students evaluated several of the characters as decision makers, again highlighting a close level of association between students and literary peers. Additionally, this regular evaluation fostered an introspective review of personal skills, thus helping to enhance the students' growth into more objective and systematic decision makers. The following descriptions illustrated this thought:

Alan: Joel and Tony have poor decision-making skills. If Tony had better decision-making skills he wouldn't have drowned, and Joel wouldn't have lied about how he died.

Marvin in My Life in the 7th Grade...didn't use any kind of systematic approach to making his decision and I would have because I would have thought about the consequences if I got caught...

Misty: Joel should have known that Tony would do anything so it didn't matter if they did it or not. Joel knew how dangerous it was, and he shouldn't have let his friend make his decision for him.

Last night I read I Know What You Did Last Summer and I think it's one of the best books I've ever read. It had so many decisions, good and bad, that had to be made. I could relate my decisions to some made in the book. And I think the characters were very realistic in that some made good decisions and some bad.

Larry: ...in On My Honor Joel should not just go along with Tony. Joel is a poor decision-maker. They don't have a good relationship.

Liberty: I don't think Izzy made a very good decision. If she had gone and thought about what might happen if she would ride with Marco, maybe she wouldn't have gone.

In the book Second Star to the Right...I think she made bad decisions. But she might have made good decisions according to her. She didn't know what she was doing. I think she just let it happen.

Alan, Misty, Larry, and Liberty: A Summary

Growing... Changing... Becoming... Young adolescents are indeed a diverse and complex collection! They face significant turning points in their lives: Some embrace the promises of adulthood; some shy away and long for the protection of childhood; still others stand completely silent,

allowing life to rush past them as they drift along on the wake of others' decisions and objectives.

George (1991) remarked that "In a real sense, student development during early adolescence is hard to capture in generalities; these students are often described as having little in common but the fact of changing development itself" (p. 4). These four case studies in adolescent decision making verified his observation to a certain extent. They painted pictures which were unique and compelling and often chasms apart.

These four young adolescents shared common bonds as well, however. These connections often surfaced through their honesty, their complex confusions, and the masks which they sometimes wore. They shared the familiar tie of teenagers who are anxious for a measure of genuine control over the world and their role within it. Realistic fiction emerged as a vehicle into this world, and a systematic plan for decision making offered a means of exploration. Like their classmates, they described the effects in rich detail, and they joined these peers in sharing an evaluation of this study.

These Students and Their Teacher Evaluate This Study

Young adolescents are at such a pivotal stage in their development. Their lives are often complicated and confusing,

and middle school teachers sense a critical need to address this developmental diversity in an appropriate and conversant fashion.

Many of this study's participants found it a relief to know that there was a world available through print where the characters live the same confusions, struggle with the same dilemmas, and resolve the same conflicts. There was no doubt that realistic fiction was relevant to these young adults, for it rendered a mirror image of the world in which they live. It provided validation for their feelings; it portrayed their development as a natural and universal turning point on the life span.

Reading, writing, discussing, describing, comparing... These students and Mrs. Timmons were eager to reflect on this study and its application to both their reading curriculum and all of life beyond the classroom. An addendum to the closing student questionnaire provided these adolescents with an opportunity to share their reflections, their evaluations, and a numerical grade for the study.

Mrs. Timmons also discussed the study, as she detailed the past eight weeks through Eisner's (1991) *Connoisseurship Approach to Educational Evaluation*. She was confident of the study's application to both this and future classes. (See Appendix C for the student questionnaire and Appendix A for the teacher's evaluation instrument.)

Final member checks from students and teacher also served as interesting post-study evaluations which occurred during the summer months. A summary of the study was mailed to each family and to Mrs. Timmons, and they were invited to comment. Their responses are shared here, as well. (See Appendix M for this summary and accompanying instructions.)

The Students Express Themselves and Grade the Study

I like the study. I don't like to read a lot, but you got me into reading books. My sister reads a lot. She is reading lots of good books too.

--Faith

I like what we are doing because it is fun reading in groups. I hope I can always do this.

--Wallace

I like you reading out loud. I like what you ask about decisions. I also like reading out of paperback books.

--Jennifer

We got to choose some of our books. I like for people to read aloud and I like to read silently. We didn't have to answer 15 or 20 questions at the end of each chapter the way we would have if we were using a textbook. It was a lot of fun. I learned how to evaluate my decisions in order to make better ones.

--Misty

Go to a book for advice about making a decision from losing weight to sex! It was very helpful, but not helpful enough.

--Alan

I don't read at all. I hate it. I'd rather be doing something fun.

--Phill

We got to read different books and we didn't have many tests. I loved everything! I learned not to make a decision without thinking about it first.

--Liberty

You can relate to books sometimes. But I don't like to read. I'd rather be fishing.

--Buck

My favorite thing was reading out loud. I like for someone to read to me without having my face in a textbook all the time. I like choosing what you want to write on.

--Sara

The only thing I didn't like was homework over the weekend. I think we only had one. But I can't think of anything else to put because I like this study.

--Melinda

Some of my favorite things about this study is: something new to learn, not another routine out of the book, able to express better and further writing skills, and able to be the first class to do your study! We have read in groups. We have had you read to us the kinds of books we like. I get to tell you my thoughts on anything in my journal. It is very fun! We don't have to take many tests like we usually do in a reading class.

--Ray

We have read in groups, and we have had you read to us the kinds of books we like. I get to tell you my thoughts on anything in my journal. It is very fun. We

don't have to take many tests like we usually do in a reading class.

--Scottie

It gave us a chance to read what we wanted. I learned how to evaluate my decisions.

--Larry

My favorite way in teaching reading during this study was reading aloud. I don't like reading by myself because I don't finish in time. We could have at least watched one movie about decision making. Watch movies about what you're talking about. I've learned that reading with the class can be fun, and serious. I enjoyed this study and made a new friend while during it.

--Tonya

My favorite things were reading out loud, not many quizzes, and sometimes what we get to write in our journals is good. I didn't like these questionnaires and at home reading because I don't have time. I learned about decision making and how to read better.

--Mandy

My favorite thing is to read out loud and take turns during class. I like the different groups of books, but we should have done some plays.

--Jeff

I learned to always express my feelings!

--Jason

Final numerical grade for the study: 96

Each of the 28 students assigned the study a grade as a part of the evaluation process. These grades were then averaged.

Mrs. Timmons Evaluates the Study

Using Eisner's Connoisseurship and Criticism Approach to Educational Evaluation (See Appendix A for an explanation of this approach and a copy of the evaluation instrument.)

This study presented the students in my classroom with the wonderful opportunity to experience the world of adolescent fiction with a core of decision-making skills and strategies. The decision-making strategies were highlighted

in each carefully chosen text, discussed, and finally compared to the DECIDE model.

This process was a gradual one, beginning with subtle references to the characters' decision making, and followed by the introduction of the DECIDE Model. Finally, the students were led to identify the character's use or lack of use of this model, and ultimately relate the model to the decisions in their own lives.

Superimposed onto this theoretical framework was a network of intentional and unintentional outcomes. Student opinion was solicited in all phases of this study, which led to the open sharing of thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Students began to examine the myriad of aspects which comprise their lives, ranging from divorce and peer pressure, to suicide and AIDS.

As students began to peel away the exterior layers, many were unprepared for the tender, fragile, unexposed heart of questions, fears, and concerns that were revealed. Through careful guidance, concern, and discretion on the part of Jeanneine Jones, those concerns were nurtured, clarified, and respected. Mutual respect and trust, a vital link between teacher and student, began to coalesce. This, as with all meaningful teaching and bonding, takes time and patience to develop. Jeanneine Jones began this relationship by first reading aloud to the students, reinforcing the position of research related to the teaching of reading.

She interspersed this approach with vocabulary, appropriate questions, both convergent and divergent, including written expression and verbal responses. The variety of techniques employed for teaching and for student responses provided outlets for varying preferred student learning styles.

Another key aspect of this curriculum was its reference to students' lives. All of the "technical" aspects of reading instruction were included, but seemed appropriate and natural due to its observed acceptance.

In this teacher's opinion, only the tip of the educational iceberg has been revealed. Time, a major constraint of this study, would reveal major implications for the teaching of reading and curriculum development, revolutionizing middle level reading instruction.

This opinion was formed as a result of observed student enthusiasm and changed behaviors. A recitation of just a few of these follows:

Tom could be characterized as typical for a student on the road which leads to dropout and failure. Hardened by previous years of failure and low achievement, he presented a seemingly impenetrable shell, untouched by traditional curriculum. This same student was observed literally fighting for a book, and was overheard expressing interest and genuine enthusiasm for the day's lesson content.

This same student later confiscated beer found in the boy's restroom, and coerced another student to turn in to me another can found in the same location. Tom later revealed the source of the alcohol, a complete contradiction of previous behavior.

Yet another example of poor decision making was observed as a student "mooned" another teacher at school. Instead of the usual continued laughter and acceptance of this act, students condemned the student for his poor decision making, citing his lack of consideration for the consequences.

For brevity's sake, I will conclude that the observation/participation in this study has personally strengthened future reading instruction, as well as bolstered a long-held stance of student empowerment and relevant, meaningful curriculum.

Final Member Checks Are Shared

The researcher mailed each of the 28 students and their families a copy of the study's final summary. Response was optional for the larger class context but was mandatory for the four case studies. The summaries were brief and fairly general, as the researcher was both protective of young egos and respectful of the anonymity that she had promised.

A full copy of both Chapters IV and V was shared with Mrs. Timmons, however. Acting as class agent, she carefully

scrutinized each section of the final document for accuracy. All responses were received in mid-July and are shared here.

One Student From the Larger Class Context Replied

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I thought that your study was great. Our classmates really enjoyed it. The book I picked to read I Know What You Did Last Summer was very interesting. I think all Western Middle School students should have a teacher who does this....Your study was correct to me. I have made some very hard decisions in my life. When we did this study about decision making, it helped me with my decisions....So far my summer has been wonderful. I hope yours is too. Write me back.

Jeff

The Four Case Studies Replied

(See Appendix M for a full copy of the summary and the accompanying instructions.)

Question 1:

Does Table 1 accurately list the social situations which your class of seventh grade students found common to their social world? (If no, how should the list be changed?)

Alan: You try to get good friends but when you really get to know them they let you down. You find out that they are involved in some of these situations listed on Table 1. Maybe your friendship goes down the drain but your life will go down the drain if you let your friends get you into these situations on Table 1.

Misty: Table 1 does accurately list the social situations which my class of 7th graders found common to our social world.

Larry: Yes, Table 1 accurately lists the social situations that I and peers have to face.

Liberty: Yes, in my class the list was in this order. Drugs weren't a problem at all.

Question 2:

Does this summary describe the study that took place in your classroom? (Especially note paragraph 1, page 3.)

Alan: Yes, the first paragraph on page 3 tells it all. I think this study wasn't just to introduce us to the situations that the characters in the books face. It was also to give us a kick in the butt to get off it and read.

Misty: This summary does describe the study that took place in our classroom.

Larry: Yes, the summary describes the study.

Liberty: Yes, very much. In the study I learned how to pick out good or bad decisions.

Question 3:

Think about pages 3 and 4 as they relate to you personally. Do they correctly describe you? (more aware of the decisions that you make? consider consequences of your actions? find adolescent fiction to be one source that you might use when you're faced with a hard decision?, etc.)

Alan: Yes, pages 3,4 correctly describe me as a responsible decision maker. I don't think I really thought about the consequences of my decisions before.

Misty: Pages 3 and 4 do correctly describe me in that I am more aware of all the decisions I make and I think some of them are better than they would have been had I not participated in the study.

Larry: Yes. I tend to think about my decisions more than I used to.

Liberty: I think everyone in the class will think twice before they make a bad decision. I liked reading those books because it was like I was reading about myself.

Question 4:

Now that a few weeks have passed, how do you look back on this study? (made you more aware of your decision-making processes? interesting way to teach a reading class or not? You'd recommend this approach to other middle school teachers? Overall, valuable or not?)

Alan: I was most appreciative that Mrs. Jones came and taught us and I am glad Mrs. Timmons let her in to teach us for the last 8 weeks. The study really has kept me out of trouble this summer.

Misty: In my eyes this study was wonderful. It is the best way I know of to teach a reading class. I would definitely recommend it to other middle school teachers.

Larry: Yes, I think this study is very valuable to me, and it should be used in schools.

Liberty: I think all teachers should teach like that. It made me more aware about choosing right or wrong.

Question 5:

Finally, have you done any reading this summer? If so, what?

Alan: I have been reading but hardly at all. I have been too busy to read. When I have, I have read magazines and The Moves Make the Man. I really haven't got into it yet.

Misty: This last question is one that you know you really don't need to ask a bookworm like me. I've read 12-15 books already this summer.
(NOTE: A listing of the book titles followed. Misty had

also written and enclosed a story about a young girl who had made a poor decision; she requested a return comment, which was immediately supplied.)

Larry: No, not really. I've mostly been reading Sports Illustrated.

Liberty: No. Sorry. I've been at (boring!) camp.

Mrs. Timmons Replied

(based on her complete reading of Chapters IV and V)

Jeanneine, I just read your study. What a mesmerizing document! This study accurately portrays the essence of my classroom, as well as offering infinite detail of the reading curriculum and student responses. The events were honestly interpreted and conveyed in a scholarly, yet easily read, fashion. It was truly a privilege to participate in this study and I and my future students will continue to reap the benefits.

--Janelle Timmons

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

What qualities do we envision in the 15-year-old who has been well served in the middle years of schooling?...Our answer is embodied in five characteristics associated with being an effective human being. Our 15-year-old will be:

- an intellectually reflective person
- a person enroute to a lifetime of meaningful work
- a good citizen
- a caring and ethical person; and
- a healthy person...

We have described the young adolescent we envision. Our vision is of such an outcome for every youth of the nation, not just for those more advantaged than others. Every human being has the capacity to achieve significant success, not just minimum competence, in each of the five areas.

Our 15-year-old is a thinking, productive, caring, and healthy person who takes seriously the responsibility of good citizenship. The challenge of the 1990s is to define and create the structures of teaching and learning for young adolescents 10 to 15 years old that will yield mature young people of competence, compassion, and promise.

--Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development
Turning Points, 1989 (pp. 16-17)

This study addressed these young adolescents, both those whom the Carnegie Council found typical, and those whom it envisioned. It tiptoed into the most important aspect of young adolescent life, the social world, and emerged with a picture that is powerful indeed. The voices of these youngsters portray the emerging adolescent as one who is tough yet fearful, confident yet anxious, directed yet confused.

This complex group of young adults is indeed America's hope and her predicament. Instead of celebrating the adolescent whom the Carnegie Council envisioned, we are alarmed by the child who is ill-prepared to meet the demands of a changing world. Instead of celebrating young adults who are reflective, directed, ethical, and healthy, we find children who approach the dilemmas of life from an attitude of indecision and peer group conformity. Instead of celebrating the student who is fluent and articulate, we see one who is functionally illiterate by society's standards.

Overview of the Study

This study addressed both the realities of adolescence and the challenges of graduating the young adult "who has been well served in the middle years of schooling" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 16). This was accomplished by describing how a literature-based curriculum influenced middle grades students' perceptions of the social decisions that they may make. This was of relevance, for these social decisions often result in a host of unhealthy and even life-threatening choices which override sound educational connections.

Grounded in 31 examples of realistic fiction, this eight-week curriculum invited a class of seventh grade students into the world of print, where they discovered a host of characters who lived the same confusions, struggled with the same

dilemmas, and resolved the same conflicts as they. These students found a literary peer group which was immersed in developmental diversities and social decision-making situations. In short, these books provided a mirror image of the world in which these students live.

In order to fully describe decision-making in the social realm of the emerging adolescent, and the effects that a literature-based curriculum might have on the choices which they make, four research questions were addressed. These included:

1. How do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors which influence their choices?

2. How do young adolescents describe young adolescent characters in selected realistic fiction?

3. When presented with a systematic framework for making decisions, how do young adolescents apply this framework to the analysis of situations in realistic fiction?

4. After a series of lessons that explore decision making using realistic fiction, how do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors that influence their choices?

Information applicable to both these questions and the adolescent's social world was gathered from 28 seventh graders and their reading teacher. This was accomplished through a variety of data collection instruments, including

questionnaires, reading journals, and formal writing assignments. Additionally, seven students were interviewed, and four of these were selected to represent the class as case studies. The students' responses concerning their world were rich in detail, often unsolicited, and compellingly honest.

The results of this data collection were analyzed qualitatively according to the guidelines suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In doing so, emerging frames of reference were constantly fine-tuned until a full understanding of both research questions and additional perceptions became evident.

In Chapter V, the research questions were answered, and the issues raised in the second chapter were addressed. Limitations of the study were examined, and implications for teaching and further research were discussed. Final thoughts from the researcher served as summary to both the chapter and the study.

The World of the Young Adolescent

Summary of Results: The Research Questions Answered

Research Question 1:

How do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors which influence their choices?

Decision-making processes. Duryea (1986) suggested that one's level of development may contribute more heavily to

healthy decision making than any other factor. Educators must therefore turn strict attention to both developmental differences in young adolescents and the conscientious teaching of appropriate decision-making skills.

A great number of these seventh graders had obviously discussed decision making with some other teacher at some other time. They knew the jargon and had many of the appropriate responses well-rehearsed. Although they did not specifically use terminology like "consequences," or "examine alternatives," they often listed in rote fashion a portion of the steps involved in planned decision making.

This was evidenced by responses to introductory questionnaire items. In this tally, 89% of the students described processes which accounted for some aspect of a systematic approach to decision making. For example, in his first writing assignment one student, Keith, detailed this process as he felt he normally applied it:

When I make decisions I do three main steps. First I consider how this will affect the future. Second, I either make the decision to go with the crowd, not go with the crowd, let parents make decision, let friends make the decision. Last and not least after the decision is made I consider if it was a good or bad decision.

It seemed that decision making had been discussed with Keith in the past, but that no one had given him ample opportunity to safely practice and internalize it in a social

setting. This assumption was illustrated by the contradiction found in the remainder of this first writing assignment.

This past Sunday my best friend, Richard, and I were faced with a decision. We wanted to go to the store but we didn't think it was right to not ask our parents. But we went ahead and just went...

In yet another instance, and at a later time, Keith shared in his May 13 journal entry:

I have been in a situation with cheating and I really think I made the worst decision possible. Plus I still regret it. But I really think that soon I will get over it. I do not wish to share my decision with you.

It therefore quickly became apparent that although Keith could recall some approach to appropriate decision making, it had never been fully internalized. Therefore, it was not successfully implemented on a regular basis.

Although 89% of the total group noted the proper things to say about decision-making procedures, they, like Keith, often failed to appropriately implement them in a social setting. The four case studies represent the diverse level of decision making which was apparent at the onset of the study.

Alan: Sometimes I don't really think about how to handle some of the situations that my friends and I get myself into. I guess I'll handle them when they hit me in the face!

Misty: I was at the mall a few Fridays ago around 8:00. I had to decide whether or not to smoke and steal and drink. The guy I was with knew I wouldn't do any of those things, but he asked anyway. I was

thinking about how I have problems breathing sometimes. And my teachers have told me that drinking kills cells in your brain and I don't want to do that. And I didn't want to get caught stealing. I realized that peer pressure doesn't bother me as much as I thought it would, and I'm happy with the decision that I made.

Larry: When I'm making decisions, I sometimes just go with the flow, like if I know it's not going to hurt anything.

Liberty: Most of the time I make my decisions right away, but when I don't, usually I talk to my best friend about it first. I think most of the time I make pretty good decisions because I don't get in very deep trouble most of the time.

Sources of influence. Many professionals noted that although peer relationships tend to be superficial and fairly short term, there is a powerful trend toward heightened conformity to peer group values during early to mid-adolescence (Dusek, 1991; Hillman, 1991; Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983; Mann, Harmoni, and Power, 1989). This drive toward conformity at almost any price was constantly illustrated by the 28 children in this group. References to peer approval seasoned all conversations at all times, and it became apparent that to many, this deep-seated need compromised even their childhood moral instruction.

Friends influence me a lot. I think they make about half of my decisions. When I see my friends doing something, I want to do the exact same thing.

I have this one friend who the rest of my friends sort of do not like, but I sort of do. I want to like her, but I don't want to lose the other friends I like.

--Jennifer

I have been in plenty of situations where I was forced to drink.

--Martin

Cheating is very common in the whole school. Especially on the C.A.T. That is the biggest test any school student would face.

--Sara

Me and my friends walked into a store. I had twenty dollars. My friends wanted me to steal something.

--Tom

I think that sexual intercourse is a problem also in 7th grade. Most of the pressure about this issue is from your peers.

--Tonya

Perhaps one of the most vivid examples of this obedient attitude was described by Jennifer. In addition to the thoughts just shared, she wrote about an incident which involved a girlfriend, Megan. Megan had insisted that Jennifer and another friend try a cigarette with her. Jennifer explained, almost in apology, "I didn't want to but...she has a lot of friends and I didn't....After that I sort of got hooked on them." Nothing seemed too great for some children to sacrifice if it meant winning the approval of a person whom they perceived as popular.

There was a small link to the positive side of peer relationships as well. Research supports the fact that peer group interactions are extremely valuable during this period in the life span, for they allow adolescents to try on a variety of roles without fear of failure (Dusek, 1991). They

allow healthy contact with others who share the same habits and concerns, displeasures and interests, dilemmas and situations. Peer group interactions encourage the development of social skills. The heterosexual composition of the group also mimics the adult world, and therefore prepares adolescents for the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood.

I really like my friends a lot. They understand me and like me a lot too. My friends and I have a lot in common. We all like sports and almost like all the same teachers. They understand me more than my parents do.

--Grant

These adolescents generally perceived parental disapproval as less threatening than the repercussions of not falling in with the peer group agenda. In fact, few complaints about parental authority surfaced during the course of this study, something which was surprising given the desperate search for autonomy that so many adolescents experience. Researchers do not underestimate the influence of parents on the adolescent's decision-making process, however. These professionals have, in fact, found that peer group influences tend to be much more ephemeral and shallow-rooted than are parental influences (Dusek, 1991; Hillman, 1991; Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983; Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989). This consensus was also illustrated within this group.

A tender and sensitive boy, Alan referenced his adoptive family in a way that led one to believe that these adults were his salvation in life. He described them many times and from many points of reference, but the words were always the same.

I think I am really special to get a loving household. My parents must really love me to choose me out of all the thousands of kids waiting to be adopted....My parents influence me on making good decisions. They sometimes make the decisions for me.

In reference to Izzy, the character who rode with a drunk date, Alan wrote:

I wouldn't have made the same decision. I have parents that are trusting, loving, and very protective. They would adore me if I were to call them and ask them to pick me up because there was drinking at this party. They would rather have a son safe and sound...

Summary for the majority was found in Treena's journal:

Sometimes I sass at my mom and get in trouble....Of course I'm not a goody goody. But I get along with my parents really well.

The children discussed the influential impact of peers and parents at length, and a total of 71% listed a combination of friends, family, and other adults as being most significant in the decisions which they had made in recent weeks. In an effort to describe the influence that literary peers might likewise have on these decision-making processes, it was necessary to first verify whether these students felt that the characters were realistic, and thus credible.

Research Question 2:**How do young adolescents describe young adolescent characters in selected realistic fiction?**

Many of these youngsters regularly provided both references to and descriptions of characters in the novels throughout the course of the study. Further, the vast majority of them (86%) noted in closing that realistic fiction was a viable source of consultation when they were faced with difficult decisions. These two facts served as evidence for the group's acceptance of the characters as realistic individuals.

The books which were initially selected for study played a critical role in the students' obvious acceptance of these characters as authentic adolescents. Offering realistic books with believable characters was a pivotal component in assuring student connections with literary peer groups. Abrahamson (cited in Holbrook, 1982) found that young teenagers undertake eight developmental tasks as they undergo the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, and he acknowledged a recent ninth addition to the listing. He also found that the adolescent characters in realistic fiction undertake the same developmental tasks. Therefore, the books used in this study were carefully selected to reflect this same developmental agenda. Included in Abrahamson's listing were the following:

1. Discovering sex roles in cultural settings;
2. Developing relationships with peers;

3. Achieving relationships with the opposite sex;
4. Accepting the physical body;
5. Changing relationships with parents;
6. Forming value patterns;
7. Making vocational decisions;
8. Working for pay; and
9. Being exposed to and accepting death (p. 380).

The point of connection between adolescent student and adolescent character became clear within this classroom. One underlying reason for this strong bond was, again, the careful selection of titles which were appropriate to this diverse group of seventh grade students. Each of the 31 novels selected explores at least one of Abrahamson's developmental tasks, and most examine several or all. For example, Ruckman's Who Invited the Undertaker? contains all nine of the tasks, although the seventh grade protagonist is too young for serious consideration of a vocational career.

Because this bond was exciting and new, the students were eager to examine it, and so they wrote about their literary peers frequently. Included were the following representative descriptions, lifted primarily from reading response journals. It is particularly interesting to note the regularity with which they compare the characters to themselves.

Who Invited the Undertaker?

I think Dale...is a very realistic character because he has real feelings just like a real person. The

things he did were those of a normal seventh grader. He thought through some of his decisions and some of them he didn't, like most seventh graders.

--Misty

...Dale and the way he hangs around with his friends and talks about girls is good. He worries about if people are going to like him, and if he wears the right clothes, and if a certain girl likes him. I think that is pretty normal.

--Larry

Dale's characteristics are much like mine! Even though my parents are divorced and his dad is dead, I think like he does. I like my mom to go on dates and go places. Still, Ivy Ruckman made Dale a very good character from my way of view. If Dale was true he would be like me.

--Jason

A Day No Pigs Would Die

I live on a farm and this story takes place on a farm. The boy in the story reminds me of myself because I love to get in trouble and so does he. But he is responsible, active, and loves to help.

--Liberty

On My Honor

I think Marion Dane Bauer did a good job on describing Joel and Tony. They really act like 7th graders, a little mature and still a little wild and crazy. It just seems so real the way that the author described the river and Tony drowning. It seems like a true nightmare.

--Grant

Tony is a person that seems to want his way. He bosses people around. He talked Joel into going swimming in the river. I think that they will get in trouble. One of them will probably drown because when you don't listen things happen. It's Tony. Most of the time whoever doesn't listen, it will probably happen to them.

Tony and Joel are not the only ones who did something like this. Two years ago me and my friend went to the park to go swimming. When we got there it was a little crowded. My friend jumped off the diving board, then I didn't see him come back up. So I thought he was somewhere else. This man pulled him up. He was breathing but his eyes were shut. The ambulance came. After a while he was alright. He was lucky because Tony died and he didn't. He never went swimming for a long time.

--Jeff

The decision making of Joel is terrible. I don't think that the author did a good job on Joel and Tony. I think Joel needs to make some decisions.

--Jason

Are You in the House Alone?

These characters had to deal with a lot of emotional problems. Like, after the girl got raped, you know, she had to go through a lot of stuff 'cause no one believed that the guy had raped her 'cause he came from a rich family and everything.

--Misty

I really liked this book. It shows a lot of real life decisions. I do recommend this book to teenagers my age. It would show them what could happen if you're not careful in your house alone....Kids my age...need to know that there is such a thing as date rape...

--Beth

My Life in the 7th Grade

Marvin ...is a very outgoing person. He is sometimes a goof-off in class. He is a pretty good decision maker. I think I also make pretty good decisions.

--Alan

Second Star to the Right

Leslie is a very smart, outgoing person but has some problems with her self-esteem. She's always saying she is fat and ugly, but she is nice and likes having fun. I think I am a little bit like her. A couple of

weeks ago, before you came, I was the same but I didn't eat anything. Sometimes I make bad decisions but this was the worst.

--Liberty

The Divorce Express

I like the book The Divorce Express. I tell you, I know how it feels to have my parents separated. But I can say I feel for Phoebe. I'm glad I'm not in her situation.

The book makes me wonder if Phoebe ever can make her own decision or is it her parents that do make her decisions? I have seen/read her make a few but I don't understand how she can live her life when her parents make her decisions.

--Jessica

The Divorce Express is a great book. It makes you feel like its happening to you now. But I'm really going through the same thing but my mom has full custody of me and my dad gets to see me every other weekend, which I like.

--Mandy

Izzy, Willy-Nilly

I thought the characters were "real." They faced the same peer pressure and problems that teenagers of today face.

--Liberty

I Know What You Did Last Summer

The "bad guy," Collie, had to make one or two very big decisions....But I don't think he did it after hours of thinking. He just did it out of anger. I don't think I do stuff out of anger.

--Misty

Bathing Ugly

A book I have just finished was very hilarious. Betsy was very determined to win the contest. She would do anything. Bathing Ugly is a great book and all kids should read it.

--Sinthia

Bathing Ugly is a good book so far. I've really enjoyed it. I think Betsy is doing a good job of working on losing weight. I really want to lose weight, so I can relate.

I think she made a good decision to lose weight but not in great amounts at a time. If I lose weight, I'll do it like Betsy did. As Betsy made her decision, I think she thought about it instead of just stopping eating or something like that. Now after part of this study, I have thought before I make my decisions.

--Treena

Just as the students began to make distinct connections with these new literary peers, they began to review and question the processes by which these characters made decisions. The DECIDE model provided a simple yet systematic vehicle for this questioning; it was applied first to the literature and then later to life.

Research Question 3:

When presented with a systematic framework for making decisions, how do young adolescents apply this framework to the analysis of situations in realistic fiction?

Harren (cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983) advocated teaching young adolescents a systematic approach to decision making, believing that they are developmentally capable of employing a structured strategy. Two examples of this "planning style" were found in the work of Janis and Mann (1977) and of Durrant, Frey, and Newbury (1991).

The latter approach was selected for this study because it was both simple and direct. The first letters of each step

form an acronym, DECIDE, and this made the model easy for the students to memorize. This was important because the researcher recognized that memorization could lead to internalization. This could, in turn, lead to the model's transfer into other situations outside of those posed in the classroom. The DECIDE model includes these steps:

1. Describe the problem.
2. Explore to identify solutions.
3. Consider the consequences for each.
4. Identify the best solution.
5. Do it.
6. Evaluate your decision and learn from it.

This model was applied to both isolated situations and entire novel plots on several occasions, with the transfer to personal understanding eventually added through questions such as "What would you do if you were the character?"

Examples of its successful application to literature are shared here.

Jennifer's illustration. Based on a situational excerpt from Voigt's Izzy, Willy-Nilly, the first illustration was developed by Jennifer. It was of particular interest because she directly and systematically related it to her own life in a way that was quite praise-worthy for her developmental level. The careful and methodical approach which she employed served as witness to her private goal of an enhanced decision-making agenda.

MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN
based on Izzy, Willy-Nilly

<u>IZZY</u>	<u>ME</u>
STEP 1: DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM	
Ride with Marco or not	Ride with a drunk boyfriend after a party
STEP 2: EXPLORE DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS	
A. Call a cab.	Same as Izzy's
B. Call your parents.	
C. Get another person.	
D. Call your friends to drive.	
E. Walk	
STEP 3: CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES	
FOR A: I might have no money.	Same as Izzy's
FOR B: They would get mad.	
FOR C: They might be drunk too.	
FOR D: They might not be home.	
FOR E: She might get raped or something.	
STEP 4: IDENTIFY THE BEST SOLUTION	
She rode with him.	I would have thought about calling my friends or parents.
STEP 5: DO IT	
She and they had a wreck.	It would have made me or him not be in a wreck.
STEP 6: EVALUATE YOUR DECISION	
It was a terrible decision.	It was a real good decision.

Danny's illustration. The second was a more indirect application, and it stemmed from the overview of an entire

novel. It was shared by Danny, a young man who quickly moved beyond Jennifer's methodical approach. Although in need of refinement, the evidence of growth toward transfer is obvious, for this application was an unsolicited journal entry.

I read the book Slake's Limbo by Felice Holman. It is about a boy named Slake who runs away from home and decides to live in a New York subway. He and his parents don't get along well. He lived in the subway for 121 days. Then he finally went back home.

He acted like a punk. He never took a lot of time to think over his decisions. I act a lot different from him. I think things over a lot longer than Slake. For example, he decided to run away from home to the New York subway. I would have tried to work it out with my parents. He didn't have any kind of systematic approach for making a decision. I would have talked to my friends about it, and he just did it without consulting anyone. The way we make decisions is not similar.

Illustrations from the case studies. As has been evident, three of the four case studies related to realistic fiction in powerful ways. Alan, Misty, and Liberty each approached print in a purposeful fashion, and each came away with an increased appreciation of the literary peer circle.

Alan, Misty, and Liberty seemed to internalize the DECIDE model and then, in turn, use it to evaluate and discuss the characters who were featured in their literary selections. Their discussions did not always adhere to the sequential listing of steps found within the model; however, like Danny, they evidenced a clear understanding of its importance as they applied it in an indirect and sophisticated fashion. Portions of their discussions follow.

Alan. Joel and Tony have poor decision-making skills. If Tony had better decision-making skills he wouldn't have drowned, and Joel wouldn't have lied about how he died.

Marvin in My Life in the 7th Grade...didn't use any kind of systematic approach to making his decision and I would have because I would have thought about the consequences if I got caught...

Misty. Izzy, Marco, and Tony...were all very realistic characters because the things they did were things a real person might have done. The situations Izzy finds herself in are situations everyone's in at one time or another, no matter how protective their parents are.

If I was Izzy, I would have gone out with Marco, too. I would have considered all of the consequences when it was time to leave. And I would have thought about what my parents would do and say because I know I'm not supposed to get into a car with a driver that is intoxicated. I knew not to do that just out of common sense. So considering all the choices, I would have told Marco we could stay a while longer because I know that my parents wouldn't care under the circumstances. Then after a while I would have just slipped out and gone to the nearest pay phone to call someone to come and get me. I think that would be a very good choice.

Last night I read I Know What You Did Last Summer and I think it's one of the best books I've ever read. It had so many decisions, good and bad, that had to be made. I could relate my decisions to some made in the book. And I think the characters were very realistic in that some made good decisions and some bad.

Liberty. I don't think Izzy made a very good decision. If she had gone and thought about what might happen if she would ride with Marco, maybe she wouldn't have gone.

In the book Second Star to the Right...I think she made bad decisions. But she might have made good decisions according to her. She didn't know what she was doing. I think she just let it happen.

These students candidly discussed the choices which their characters made, and they frequently compared them to their

own decision-making approaches. This, in turn, awakened a sense of self-control which they suddenly found available within their own social lives. These seventh graders became eager to set aside discussions of their characters in favor of more personal conversations.

Research Question 4:

After a series of lessons that explore decision-making using realistic fiction, how do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors that influence their choices?

There was clear evidence of enhanced decision-making skills displayed in the second distribution of the study's questionnaire. When asked to detail a recent social situation, 93% of the students described an approach that mirrored the DECIDE model, or some portion of it (as opposed to the original 89%). Further, gains were noted in the number of children who made decisions resulting in immediate gratification (10% as opposed to an initial 40%).

Proud of their growth and eager to discuss it, several of the students boasted of their new sense of self-awareness and enhanced decision-making abilities. Three of the four case studies detailed this growth, and they provided the comparative representation for the percentile changes from the beginning of the study.

It was important to note their references to influencing factors; this researcher considered it meaningful that the

children began to consciously recognize these sources of persuasion as inextricably intertwined in the decision-making process. For some of these children, these influencing factors had now expanded to include the world of realistic fiction.

Alan: Most of the time I make good decisions because I spend time thinking about them and talking to people about them. But sometimes I just let them happen....

I would tell other people to not let decisions happen to them and think it through hard and talk to somebody if you need to, like I talk to my parents. Stealing is a major decision that you can make or you can let your peers make that decision, but you have already messed up by letting them make that decision for you. You need to think of the consequences....

I don't really like to read but I think this will get me back in the groove of reading again. I'd go to the library now and ask for a book and read about the same situations and make a decision then.

Misty: I am becoming more aware of my decisions, situations, like having sex. Yes, I'm going to do it, or no I'm not. I would think about my priorities and values. And what my friends would think and the way I was brought up. And what I wanted to do.

My decisions are pretty half and half, good and bad. A lot of times you just sort of do something and a lot of times you'll just think about it and if you don't think about it a lot of times it will be a bad decision....Just think about it real good. If you have already decided not to do something, then you'll have a better chance of not doing it....

I think literature can have an effect on the way you made decisions because if you read a book and the character makes a bad decision, you can find out what might happen as a result of that decision. And then if you're faced with a decision that's similar, you'll know sort of what you should do.

Larry: My friends influence my life and my actions very much. For example, I bet that I asked my friends things like, should I do this, or should I do that, at least a million times a day....

My parents trust me and all....If someone was drinking alcohol and they asked me to ride with them, I would not ever ride home with a drunk person.

I have decided to make better decisions, and try to find out about what I'm going to choose, and how I treat people.

Liberty: (in reference to Leslie, a character who suffers from anorexia) I would probably have told my parents. First I would have thought about how I look right now. Second I would see if I'm happy. Third, I would see if I hurt anyone. Fourth, I would make my decision....

There was a time at the last dance that a couple of people were smoking and they asked me....I said no.... I thought I made a pretty good decision. I was very comfortable with it, because if I had done it, it would have proved that I didn't think very much of myself and let them control my life....Don't let your friends control your life.

These students obviously enjoyed the curriculum which was introduced into both their reading classroom and their lives. This curriculum provided them with a vehicle into a literary world that was a mirror image of their own. Immersed in this new environment, they found themselves free to safely explore and experiment with characters and circumstances that were common to their own lives. In the majority, it awakened a sense of greater control over their social world and provided a systematic approach to their decision making within it.

As the students moved through this new literary world, meeting characters and probing circumstances, the researcher remained concerned with three larger issues which had emerged from the research review that preceded this study:

1. The need to explore Harren's notion (cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983) that young adolescents are developmentally capable of implementing a structured approach to decision making;

2. The need to investigate realistic fiction as a possible foundation to reading within the middle grades curriculum; and

3. The need to approach both reading and decision making in ways that encourage their transfer from classroom to private life.

Conclusions: The Issues Addressed

Issue 1:

The need to further explore Harren's notion that young adolescents are developmentally capable of implementing a structured approach to decision making

Harren (as cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983) believed that young adolescents are developmentally capable of implementing a structured plan for decision making. Two examples of this type of plan include the prescriptive approach suggested by Janis and Mann (1977), and the DECIDE Strategy for Decision Making discussed by Durrant, Frey, and Newbury (1991). Harren further proposed that many adolescents really employ one or more of three approaches: the planning style, the intuitive style, and the dependent style. Simon (1976) added a fourth approach to this list, the "good enough" style.

Schvaneveldt and Adams (1983) reviewed over 30 articles which focused on the decision-making habits of this age group, including the research of both Harren and Simon. After this review, they suggested that the majority of young adolescents actually appear to seesaw between the intuitive (feels right) and the "good enough" (minimal criteria reviewed) approaches.

This was corroborated by these seventh graders during the opening stages of this study. They described their initial decision-making processes in ways that authenticated Schvaneveldt and Adams, whose assessment acknowledged the popularity of the intuitive and "good enough" methods. Many of these youngsters also relied heavily on Harren's suggestion of a dependent approach; few regularly exhibited his more ideal suggestion of a planned strategy.

Included in this assessment was the observation that several did indeed seesaw between a number of approaches, although, again, few initially implemented a planned strategy in their introductory descriptions and discussions.

The intuitive approach. Alan was an impulsive young man who was bent on following his inner voice as to what he felt was right. He rarely exhibited the maturity that brings careful planning, however, and this led to several disappointments for him. One example of these unplanned and disappointing decisions came later in the study, and it involved a call to his feuding grandfather and cousin on a three-way telephone system. Alan neither consulted his

parents nor thought through what might happen if his cousin and grandfather were not receptive to his intervention. They indeed were not, and so Alan hung up with the resigned, "I tried."

When he approached the researcher for advice, she suggested that he apply the situation to the DECISION-MAKING PLAN that was in use in the classroom. He was able to generate other options through this plan, although he had not thought to use it originally, relying solely on the intuitive approach.

Widespread reliance on this intuitive approach was also demonstrated by the initial 40% of the questionnaire's respondents who described decisions involving immediate gratification, relying basically on "what feels right," or perhaps what "works" at the time.

The "good enough" approach. The "good enough" approach was also clearly evident in many of these students, for they included such things as "...how this will affect the future" and "...I considered if it was a good or bad decision." However, like Keith, they actually displayed little evidence of employing any systematic decision-making approach. It was not that they were ignorant of these steps; a systematic approach was just too time consuming. Larry also illustrated this when he decided to break up with his girlfriend based on his friends' advice. He thought about the situation; however, he did not think long, and he thought no farther than friends.

Further documentation of this initial reliance on a "good enough" approach was also established by the introductory questionnaire. This instrument found that 44% of the respondents described situations which involved short-range consequences, or thoughts that carried through to a certain point and then simply stopped short of future considerations.

These representative illustrations and the questionnaire responses seem to confirm Schvaneveldt and Adams's contention that most young adolescents rely on the intuitive and "good enough" approaches, for the introductory questionnaire placed 84% of the total group in these two categories (as determined by a need for immediate gratification and a consideration of short-range consequences).

The dependent approach. The dependent approach was not as prominent in Schvaneveldt and Adams's (1983) assessment of decision-making techniques among young adolescents, although it was fairly common among this particular group of students. Characterized by the heavy use of others' opinions and recommendations, this approach was discussed in detail by Harren (cited in Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983). He described the dependent decision maker as one who assumes little self-responsibility, relying on both others and the situation itself to define the variables used in approaching the decision.

Larry again returned to mind, as he began his journal entries with a reference to heavy influence from his peers:

May 4, 1992: I heard that a girl wanted to date me. I knew what she was like, but didn't know if I should. I thought about it and asked my friends what I should do. They said I should, and I came to the conclusion, yes...

As with Larry, the social world of these seventh graders was by far the most dominant force in their day-to-day encounters. Ample demonstration of their reliance on the dependent style can be seen through their heavy peer influence on nearly all their decisions.

The planned approach. This initial assessment of the class laid a foundation on which to plot the study's progress and effects; they opened with obvious references to the intuitive, "good enough," and dependent styles of decision making.

In contrast, closing appraisals witnessed these students as capable of understanding and implementing a planned, or systematic, approach to decision making. As noted by Ross (1981), knowledge of the process is the first step to "wise and compassionate decision-making" (p. 279). When reinforced over time, this planned approach becomes intrinsic and therefore proves an invaluable reinforcement to decision-making growth and maturity.

In the closing questionnaire, 93% of the students described situations by detailing some component of a

systematic decision-making process as studied through the DISCOVER Strategy for Decision Making (Durrant, Frey, & Newbury, 1991). For example, many mentioned a consideration of consequences, a generating of multiple alternatives, consultation with a knowledgeable source, and/or the objective evaluation of the final decision in order to learn from it. It would therefore seem that these 28 young adolescents are developmentally capable of both understanding and implementing a structured approach to decision making.

Again, the four case studies provided illustration of this growth. They acknowledged the need for a planned approach, and they offered the foundation for implementation.

Alan: Most of the time I make good decisions because I spend time thinking about them and talking to people... I would tell other people not to let decisions happen to them and think it through hard and talk to somebody if you need to...You need to think of the consequences.

Misty: I would think about my priorities and values... A lot of times you just sort of do something and a lot of times you'll just think about it and if you don't think about it a lot of times it will be a bad decision...If you have already decided not to do something, then you'll have a better chance of not doing it...

Larry: I have decided to make better decisions, and try to find out about what I'm going to choose...

Liberty: (in reference to Leslie, a character): I would probably have told my parents. First I would have thought about how I look right now. Second, I would see if I'm happy. Third, I would see if I hurt anyone. Fourth, I would make my decision...

Final writing assignments also underscored this growth in awareness, and therefore in the ability to implement a planned approach. In this composition, students created a social scenario in which they played the role of main character.

One example of this was shared by Tonya, a hesitant young lady who was eager to eliminate several sources of confusion and frustration in her own life; the majority of these stemmed from demands for peer group conformity. She was a classic example of the child who struggles between family values and peer demands. Her story is reflective of a character who takes a stand, considers long-range consequences, and then evaluates his decision. He is pleased, as is she.

It was a very cloudy day in L.A. There were two people trying to influence a little kid to do drugs. The two teenagers' names were Lorenzo, who didn't make good grades in school and he was a trouble maker, and Gary. He was also a trouble maker and didn't make good grades either.

There was this one student that was smart, made good grades, and wore glasses. His name was Salvester. The problem was doing drugs to fit in with the bigger kids. Salvester wanted to be like the teenagers. In his mind he didn't want to do drugs, but he knew that they'd call him names. Salvester started thinking about consequences and his reputation, and how popular and cool he may become. He decided not to do it.

Then the next day in school they see him and start picking on him. So the decision is made. He feels good about himself, then again he feels bad about himself, because he gets picked on every single day. But Salvester still has his education, even if he doesn't have many friends.

I would have done the same thing Salvester did. Why ruin an education for drugs? I want the other kids who are ever in a situation like this To Just Say No!!!

Issue 2:**The need to investigate realistic fiction as a possible foundation to reading within the middle grades curriculum**

(This stems from the thought that realistic fiction can provide a curriculum that is "rich in meaning," literacy-based, relevant, and impacting on the decision-making agendas of early adolescents. Therefore, its potential is both expansive and enduring.)

The words "developmental responsiveness" have all but lost their meaning in much of the middle grades curriculum employed in today's schools. In reality, "...American education has continued to give homage to a curriculum that was established in the last century under vastly different circumstances and for a markedly different clientele" (Lounsbury, 1991b, p. 3).

Arnold (1991) called for a middle level curriculum which is "rich in meaning." He explained that it must embody three important characteristics.

First, and quite obviously, (this curriculum) deals with material which is genuinely important and worth knowing....Second, meaningful curriculum deals effectively with values....Third, for curriculum to be rich in meaning, both its content and methodology must relate substantively to the needs and interests of young adolescents (pp. 8-10).

The Middle Level Curriculum Project added that the successful development of this curriculum lies in the evolution of three types of questions:

1. Inquiries which young adolescents have about themselves, including self-concept and self-esteem, the future, and personal experiences with developmental changes;

2. Questions which they often ask about their own world, including generalities or particulars concerning family units, peer relationships, cultures and societies, as well as the global community; and

3. Questions which are frequently not asked by early adolescents, yet which are important nonetheless, because they all live in a common world. For example, issues, problems, and concerns that are commonly confronted by all people, such as war and peace, human relations, prejudice, and poverty (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992, p. 93).

When one drops from the broad scope of general curriculum development to a more specific level, reading emerges as the foundation on which all of knowledge acquisition is built. To this end, the Commission on Reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, Eds., 1985) underscored the fact that "reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school, and indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost" (p. 1).

The Carnegie Council (1989) emphasized this, as well. It challenged every middle school in this country to be aware of the fact that our current job market necessitates higher levels of literacy than our educational system is producing. Further, these demands will continue to increase. It warned that "The challenge of the 1990s is to define and create the structures of teaching and learning for young adolescents 10

to 15 years old that will yield mature young people of competence, compassion, and promise" (p. 17). Priority must therefore be placed on creating a successful reading curriculum which is "rich in meaning," relevant, and inviting to the contemporary adolescent.

In addition, those who advocate a curriculum renaissance at the middle level note the need for healthier decision-making skills; it is often a myriad of poor decisions which prevent today's teens from approaching classroom doors alert and prepared to learn. Wales, Nardi, and Stager (1986) called for an integration of decision-making skills and relevant curriculum, and they guaranteed that the resulting lifestyle would involve a brighter focus for American youth. They reminded us that

decision makers play the roles of philosopher, scientist, designer, and builder. Schooling focused on decision making and critical thinking skills that serve it, and the knowledge base that supports it, will allow students to learn these roles, to claim their capacity to think and their heritage as human beings (p. 41).

These demands are met by a middle school curriculum which features contemporary realistic fiction as its cornerstone. These concerns for a relevant curriculum, higher literacy levels, and enhanced decision-making skills are easily merged through books that have been written about, and for, adolescents. The social world portrayed within these novels

provides the child with a backdrop which readily lends itself to the safe exploration of any number of social issues.

This genre is consuming, for within the pages of these novels students find a world that is a mirror image of their own social domain. This world provides room and board to a host of literary peers who face similar problems and who must make frustrating decisions. They, too, face confusing periods of personal development, increasing pressures for peer conformity, and changing family agendas.

This genre is empowering, for the frequent use of realistic fiction affords the complex young adolescent an opportunity to safely discover the habits associated with healthy decision making. It allows the student to assess a character's decision-making agenda, and in doing so, allows the student an opportunity to better prepare for social decisions which s/he may confront in the future. Realistic fiction also provides a tangible bridge for those young adolescents who have not yet reached a developmental level which assures an ease in abstract thinking abilities. For those who have, it supplies reinforcement and expansion for these mental scenarios.

By employing this genre in the classroom, teachers present a curriculum which is "rich in meaning...genuinely important and worth knowing...values laden...and relevant to the needs and interests of young adolescents" (Arnold, 1991, pp. 8-10). These teachers focus on questions which

adolescents ask about themselves and their world, and they nudge them into a more cognizant level of social consciousness and global awareness (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992). These teachers feature reading as a relevant and pleasurable activity, thus ensuring it as the "cornerstone for a child's success in school, and indeed, throughout life" (Commission on Reading: Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, Eds., 1985, p. 1). Further, they contribute to the Carnegie Council's (1989) goal of "...mature young people of competence, compassion, and promise" (p. 17). Realistic fiction can indeed provide a successful foundation to reading within the contemporary middle grades classroom.

This study provided a rich description of the effects of such a curriculum in the reading classroom. When one compares these case studies, introduction to closing, one clearly witnesses growth in both an increased awareness of self-control and an enhanced level of decision making. Three of the four students explicitly referenced or displayed the direct influence of realistic fiction on these strengthened agendas.

Alan: I don't really like to read but I think this will get me back in the groove of reading again. I'd go to the library now and ask for a book and read about the same situations and make a decision then.

Misty: I think literature can have an effect on the way you made decisions because if you read a book and the character makes a bad decision, you can find out what might happen as a result of that decision. And then

if you're faced with a decision that's similar, you'll know sort of what you should do.

Liberty: (in reference to Leslie, a character who suffers from anorexia): In the book, Second Star to the Right, Leslie is a very smart, outgoing person but has some problems with her self-esteem. She's always saying she is fat and ugly, but she is nice and likes having fun. I think I am a little bit like her. A couple of weeks ago, before you came, I was the same but I didn't eat anything. Sometimes I make bad decisions but this was the worst...

I think she made bad decisions. But she might have made good decisions according to her. She didn't know what she was doing. I think she just let it happen.

I would probably have told my parents. First I would have thought about how I look right now. Second I would see if I'm happy. Third, I would see if I hurt anyone. Fourth, I would make my decision. I'm different from her because I made an effort to see if I would hurt anyone and she didn't.

When one considers the remainder of the group, it becomes apparent that these case studies were reflective of class standings. In the closing questionnaire, 93% of the total group evidenced some mirroring of the systematic DECIDE model. Further, 86% stated in their journals that realistic fiction was an appropriate basis for consultation when difficult social decisions arise (May 25 prompt). The following corroborate those illustrations provided by Alan, Misty, and Liberty:

I have really enjoyed reading these books and discussing things about young adults and teenagers. I really feel about things different now. I thought that I was the only one that had problems but now I have noticed that I'm not.

--Grant

If I was Izzy I would have called a friend and told them to come and get me. I wouldn't have rode home with a drunk person. I wouldn't have cared if they would have called me names. I would tell them to straighten up, and they could say what they want to.

--Tom

The books that we're reading have seemed so real. You can look back at the books and see that their decisions are very much like ours. If you ever have a problem or a decision to make, you can look back at the books if they are similar to yours.

--Melinda

You can learn from the mistakes these characters make in their decision.

--Scottie

Some books have an effect on people. For example, if you are having trouble at home... Your parents are fussing at you every day. You decide you would run away. You could read a book of someone running away and quitting school. You will know what kind of future they got. You might see what would happen to you. That might of been a fiction book, but it could of been wrote just for you. They might change their minds and think more about what they were going to do.

For example, I kind of understand what Buff is going through in The Boy Who Drank Too Much. You want to impress your parents and do everything they want. It is very stressing to be expected to do perfect on everything. My parents expect me to make the honor roll. I have always made the B honor roll all my life and they expect me to do it now. This time I made the A. It wasn't no big deal to them. She said to keep it up. Also, I have a dad who drinks off and on. He don't hit me but he fusses a lot. My father has never laid a hand on me, even when I was small. Also about his (the character's) mom. My mom isn't dead but it is just like she is. I haven't seen her in over 3 years even though she lives a few blocks away.

--Sara

I found out from reading about drinking and smoking what to do if you got hooked. I used to smoke and I read a book and it helped.

--Jennifer

Books can help you decide better on the decisions that you make. People that decide in the books can help you decide better in life!

--Wallace

Issue 3:

The need to approach both reading and decision making in ways that encourage their transfer from classroom to private life

Reading. Several students remarked about the pleasure that they experienced when reading relevant books of their own choosing in a classroom setting. It was assumed that these enthusiastic attitudes about reading would spill over into the months ahead, and would therefore increase the amount of time that many of these students spend engaged in the reading process. A sampling of their remarks included the following:

I don't like to read a lot, but you got me into reading books.

--Faith

We have had you read to us the kinds of books we like. I get to tell you my thoughts on anything in my journal. It is very fun! We don't have to take many tests like we usually do in a reading class.

--Scottie

We get to choose some of our books. I like for people to read aloud and I like to read silently. We didn't have to answer 15 or 20 questions at the end of each chapter the way we would have if we were using a textbook. It was a lot of fun. I learned how to evaluate my decisions in order to make better ones.

--Misty

We got to read different books and we didn't have many tests. I loved everything! I learned not to make a decision without thinking about it first.

--Liberty

I don't really like to read but I think this will get me back in the groove of reading again. I'd go to the library now and ask for a book...

--Alan

Perhaps one of the most interesting descriptions was offered by Mrs. Timmons. She discussed Tom in the evaluation:

Tom could be characterized as typical for a student on the road which leads to dropout and failure. Hardened by previous years of failure and low achievement, he presented a seemingly impenetrable shell, untouched by traditional curriculum. This same student was observed literally fighting for a book, and was overheard expressing interest and genuine enthusiasm for the day's lesson content.

Finally, one bubbly young lady mailed this researcher an unsolicited letter which arrived about two weeks after the close of both the study and the school term. In typical adolescent style, Treena described the first few days of summer:

Dear Mrs. Jones,

Hey! How are you? I'm fine. Do you remember me telling you that my mom bought the (book) I Know What You Did Last Summer? Well, I just got finished reading it and figured you would want to know I loved it! I finished it in two days between soap operas! Ha! Ha! It was a wonderful book. I couldn't hardly put it down. Tonight we had to go visit a couple that just had a baby. I was at the part where you find out who "Collie" really is and my parents said, "Treena Elaine, let's go." I couldn't wait to get back home. But I do wonder how did "Barry and Helen" get with their injuries. Did I miss it or did it say? I wanted to tell my mom what happened sooooo bad but I promised not to tell her until she reads it and then we'll discuss it. Hey by

the way, did "Collie" ever die? Sorry for all the mistakes. Talk to you later.

Love,
Treena

P.S. Please write back.
Sorry so sloppy!
Have a great summer!

Decision making: From print to life. In addition to the comparison of case studies and questionnaire responses, confirmation of enhanced decision-making skills included the transfer of situational decisions from literary characters to self. These literary transfers became stronger and more frequent as the study progressed, and as the children began to internalize and become comfortable with the decision-making process. It was assumed that, like the increased fondness for pleasure reading, these enhanced attitudes and approaches would spill from classroom into life, in at least a majority of these students.

One recently cited example of this transfer from print to life was found in Liberty's discussion of Leslie, the character who suffered from anorexia. Two others followed Liberty's discussion. The first focused on a young man's comparison of Izzy and himself, and the second detailed one girl's family in relationship to Buff, an alcoholic character in The Boy Who Drank Too Much.

In the book, Second Star to the Right, Leslie is a very smart, outgoing person but has some problems with her self-esteem....I think I am a little bit like her. A couple of weeks ago, before you came, I was the same but I didn't eat anything. Sometimes I make bad decisions but this was the worst...

--Liberty

If I was Izzy I would have called a friend and told them to come and get me. I wouldn't have rode home with a drunk person. I wouldn't have cared if they would have called me names. I would tell them to straighten up, and they could say what they want to.

--Tom

I kind of understand what Buff is going through in The Boy Who Drank Too Much. You want to impress your parents and do everything they want. It is very stressing to be expected to do perfect on everything. My parents expect me to make the honor roll. I have always made the B honor roll all my life and they expect me to do it now. This time I made the A. It wasn't no big deal to them. She said to keep it up. Also, I have a dad who drinks off and on....My mom isn't dead but...I haven't seen her in over 3 years...

--Sara

Decision making: In others. In addition to the transfer between print and child, several journal entries also referenced an increased awareness in others' decision making. For example, Misty mentioned an adult who she felt had made a bad decision. Another student discussed a movie where the character had made a bad decision.

Liberty and I have both been faced with a decision the past few days. One of our used-to-be friends started saying things about us and starting rumors about us, but no one believed what she said. We were very mad and were ready to fight her and we still are. But we made the decision not to because we didn't want to get suspended.

So instead we told an adult here at school who knew her, and he told us that this girl was having a lot of problems lately and that we should just forget it. But how easy is it to forget something like that? We really think that this adult, by not settling the matter, made a bad decision.

--Misty

I watched a movie last night called "Gun-Ho." The main character made a really bad decision. He decided to lie to all of his workers and friends and they all got mad at him.

--Martin

Decision Making: Increased awareness of social responsibility and values clarification. A growing awareness of social responsibility and values clarification was also evident. Given the developmental characteristics of the age, this developing awareness was recognized as an appropriate and welcome offshoot of the study.

McEwin and Thomason (1989) found that early adolescence brings with it a recognition of conscience, and thus an awakening to such values as fairness and honesty. Hillman (1991) added that these "youngsters strive toward socially responsible behaviors," and that "they are in the process of developing an ethical system to guide their behavior" (p. 7).

It was important to note that these 28 students were at a profusion of places in their individual levels of social and emotional development, particularly in light of their awakening sense of social consciousness and values. Some of the students evidenced a global concern for others, and yet

some seemed unaware of anything that happened outside of their small microcosm of school and home. Still others exhibited the stirring to introspective questioning over past decisions which they had made.

For example, one girl discussed the recent riots in Los Angeles, which occurred as a result of the acquittal of four police officers who were video-taped while beating Rodney King into custody. Another described a situation which involved the use of illegal drugs. Finally, two young men volunteered discussions on recent decisions.

In my mind the (not guilty) verdict is very messed up. I don't think it is fair to move from a mostly black city to a all white city to have a trial that had taken place in South Central L.A. What's more wrong than that is they had a whole white jury. I don't blame people in L.A. for doing what they are doing. I'm not saying I think it's right but it is fair. There are mostly teenagers doing all of these things. They are messing up their futures and the futures of others who has not taken or beat up anyone. Bush gets on TV and saying that there is mobsters and gangsters. The gang hasn't even got in it. There is individual people doing their own thing. I hope Rodney King gets what he deserves which is everything. He went through so much to get nothing.

--Sara

I've been asked by two girls over at the park about should they take these drugs these girls gave them. One said no, but the other was undecided. I talked to the girls about drugs. I knew the girls. They were about 6 or 7, maybe one year older. When I told them about the drugs they turned the two girls in.

--Jessica

I found a man's wallet. I didn't know what to do with it. I wanted to keep it because it was one hundred and sixty dollars. In some kind of way I wanted to give it back because I knew the man had to pay his bills. I

kept on thinking about it. I finally made my decision. I was going to give the money back to the man. When I gave it to him I got nerves (nervous) at first then he gave me 50 dollars.

--Scottie

I have been in a situation with cheating and I really think I made the worst decision possible. Plus I still regret it....I do not wish to tell you what my decision was.

--Keith

Mrs. Timmons continued the story of Tom, who evidenced both an enhanced sense of values clarification and social consciousness, as well as changed patterns of decision making.

She concluded with a vignette which served to underscore the broadened perspectives of the entire class.

This same student later confiscated beer found in the boy's restroom, and coerced another student to turn in to me another can found in the same location. Tom later revealed the source of the alcohol, a complete contradiction of previous behavior.

Yet another example of poor decision making was observed as a student "mooned" another teacher at school (last week of the study). Instead of the usual continued laughter and acceptance of this act, students condemned the student for his poor decision making, citing his lack of consideration for the consequences.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study impacted these seventh graders in a very positive way, it presented three limitations which must be addressed. These restrictions included the following:

1. As with many qualitative studies, the sample size was small and was not necessarily reflective of typical seventh grade students. However, great care was taken to compensate for this through the use of thick description. This rich portrayal was further enhanced by the narrative voices of Alan, Misty, Larry, Liberty, and Mrs. Timmons. By vicariously participating in their conversations, the reader will be able to render a personal assessment as to the study's conclusions.

2. Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the diversity of development found within all young adolescents, it seems likely that teachers would prefer more time for this study. Eight weeks allowed sufficient opportunity for an understanding of adolescent culture, a testing of possible misconceptions, and an awakened sense of student confidence in the researcher. However, a longer interval would encourage a deeper sense of trust from the students. It would also allow them to relax a bit more, thereby increasing their level of pleasure with the home reading component.

3. Because the study was conducted at the school where the researcher previously taught, she was not a totally neutral observer. Objectivity remained a vital concern, however, and the researcher acknowledges that her perceptions and observations were processed through the filters of familiarity. Certainly, this may have affected her interpretations in some way. However, great care was taken to compensate for this possibility through numerous member checks

and an accurate portrayal of context, procedures, and conversations through thick and rich description.

Implications for Teaching and Further Research

Young adolescents today make fateful choices, fateful for them and for our nation. The period of life from ages 10 to 15 represents for many young people their last best chance to choose a path toward productive and fulfilling lives.

Depending on family circumstances, household income, language, neighborhood, or the color of their skin, some of these young adolescents receive the education and support they need to develop self-respect, an active mind, and a healthy body. They will emerge from their teens as the promising youth who will become the scientists and entrepreneurs, the educators and health care professionals, and the parents who will renew the nation. These are the thoughtful, responsible, caring, ethical, and robust young people the Task Force envisions. To them, society can entrust the future of the country with confidence.

Under current conditions, however, far too many young people will not make the passage through early adolescence successfully. Their basic human needs--caring relationships with adults, guidance in facing sometimes overwhelming biological and psychological changes, the security of belonging to constructive peer groups, and the perception of future opportunity--go unmet at this critical stage of life. Millions of these young adolescents will never reach their full potential.

--The Carnegie Council, 1989
(p. 20)

This study responded to the realities of adolescence in this country. It addressed the "fateful choices" which our young adults confront on a daily basis. It balanced those who "will emerge from their teens as the promising youth who will become...the future of the country...." and those children who

"will not make the passage through early adolescence successfully" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 20). In doing so, this curriculum became one positive response to the challenge of graduating the young adult "who has been well served in the middle years of schooling" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 16).

In order to well serve these young adolescents, we as educators must consider the key components of Ross's "wise and compassionate decision making," for sensitive choices are certainly a cornerstone of the healthy young adult. Based on this study, I feel that we must weave these components into a curriculum that is entwined with all of life, for teaching in isolation rather than integration has never had much impact. Finally, we must address and resolve personal dilemmas that slide into our professional routines, for they often override even the best of our endeavors.

"Wise and Compassionate Decision-Making"

John Ross (1981) identified key components to "wise and compassionate decision-making" (p. 279) as they relate to the classroom. These three components include:

1. Knowledge of the decision-making process, including a recognition of consequences;
2. Affective dispositions among teachers, who in turn work to instill in students a recognition of and a respect for the rights of others; responsibility; and
3. Information-processing skills, or the ability to obtain related sets of information and process them within a decision-making context (p. 279).

This study indicated that it is indeed possible to successfully weave these key components into a reading curriculum that is "rich in meaning," literacy-based, relevant, and impacting on the decision-making agendas of the early adolescent. In doing so, this curriculum utilized Ross's key components: knowledge, affect, and skill.

Knowledge

Ross explained that this first ingredient "involves knowledge of the decision context, (and) the acquisition of appropriate bodies of information sufficient to ground decision-making in real life experience" (p. 279).

The decision context. The participants in this study found themselves immersed in a literary world that was a mirror image of their own. They frequently referenced the realistic portrayals of the characters and their literary lives, and they regularly compared themselves to many of these literary peers. They therefore explored a decision-making context that unfolded through the integration of their lives and a literary world.

These literary selections were the direct result of the researcher turning a critical eye toward characters and plot which were realistic, accurate, and of interest to the student. This included parental, peer, and sibling interactions, as well as relevant and authentic settings. Additionally, the solutions were realistic (Rudman, 1984).

The acquisition of appropriate bodies of information sufficient to ground decision-making in real life experience.

This integration of realistic, accurate literature and the decision-making context of life catapulted the group into regular class discussions; many of these conversations focused on clarifying and extending the factual information which served as foundation for choices introduced through the reading. Therefore, appropriate bodies of knowledge were presented and examined through class and peer group discussions. Again, emphasis was placed on transferring these literary critiques from characters into life. As a result, it seems that these students now know more about decision making.

Affect

Ross continued that "...affective dispositions...give a high priority to beliefs and attitudes that sensitize students to the needs and rights of others while instilling a sense of personal control and responsibility" (p. 279).

The needs and rights of others. This study concentrated on a comparison of literature and life as it promoted a healthy respect for the diversities of adolescence. Because it promoted and celebrated these differences, it encouraged students to recognize and respect those who were unlike themselves. This was accomplished through an examination of characters who represented a range of cultural diversities and a myriad of decision-making situations and dilemmas.

Personal control and responsibility. Mature discussion of this range of characters and circumstances was coupled with an implementation of the DECIDE model. This, in turn, led to a heightened awareness of personal accountability to self, others, and society. Students therefore discovered an enhanced sense of both self-control and responsibility. As a result, their comments in journals, discussions, and interviews indicated a willingness to assume more responsibility for their decisions.

Skill

Finally, Ross concluded, "information-processing skills...are cognitive strategies involving the development and application of procedures to organize, select, and interpret information within a decision context" (p. 280).

Again, the DECIDE model provided a method of exploration for information found within a decision-making context. For example, this model requires a systematic investigation of alternatives, a consideration of the consequences that are coupled with each alternative, an identification of the best one, and a final evaluation of the resulting choice. As documented in this report, the students' descriptions of their decisions indicated that they understood the DECIDE procedure and could use it as they wished.

The Integrated Curriculum

As was discussed in the opening pages of this chapter, many of these seventh grade students had obviously been exposed to prior information concerning a planned approach to mature decision-making. Many, however, like Keith, could only recite the jargon. When applying it to a complex social world, they simply stopped short of understanding. From a teacher's perspective, full understanding of a concept requires that it be grounded in life and that it be verbally shared. This curriculum met both of these objectives.

Lounsbury (1991b) listed a relevant thought:

I remember:
10% of what I read
20% of what I hear
30% of what I see
50% of what I see and hear
70% of what I discuss with others
80% of what I experience by doing
95% of what I teach to others (p. 4).

This curriculum was clearly grounded in the higher end of this spectrum, for it nurtured both discussion and teaching within peer group and classroom settings. It allowed for the safe and vicarious exploration of life's experiences, as well: these students immersed themselves in the situations found within books in order to better prepare for those found within the social world.

It is within this latter statement that the majority strength of this curriculum is found. Rather than bombard

students with textbook excerpts, this curriculum lured them into definitive works of fiction which accurately portrayed their interests, their concerns, and their social world. Rather than constantly stress isolated vocabulary skills and meaningless comprehension tests, this curriculum drew the children into both verbal and written discussions of the readings as related to their own lives, with meanings carefully incorporated. Rather than depend upon instruction which was teacher-led and teacher-dominated, this curriculum required students to participate in a classroom that was child-centered, child-responsive, and founded on choice. Rather than hide behind closed doors each day, this curriculum encouraged both parental perusal of materials and frequent interactions with researcher and child. Reciprocal respect and positive attitudes were nurtured in a very real way, as the curriculum addressed the challenges of graduating the healthy young adult "who has been well served in the middle years of schooling" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 16).

Personal Dilemmas

Nothing is without its price, and so it is with this study, as well. Two immediate dilemmas come to mind, although they are by no means predicaments that have presented themselves as offshoots of the past eight weeks. Rather, the first has long plagued my classroom teaching, and the second is a misinterpretation that I deeply fear.

Realistic Fiction Is Controversial: Who Decides?

Realistic fiction is sometimes an arguable genre among parents, for the situations which it portrays are often the very things that these adults want to protect their children from experiencing. It is for this reason that parents are prone to question classroom selections. Who compromises? I am in desperate search of an ethical answer to that question. An example comes to mind which is quite relevant.

Larry's mother came to the first of the two parent meetings. Arms crossed and eyes buzzing, I felt that she was there with a hidden agenda. Although she relaxed considerably before the end of the hour, she still left armed with several of the selections that had been booktalked during the meeting.

A firm, but polite, letter accompanied the return of one book, Peck's Are You in the House Alone?. Under no circumstances was her son to be exposed to this book; he was not ready for its sexual content, although there are no graphic scenes found within this story. She was gracious in that she noted no objections to anyone else in the class reading it, but her son was not to do so for any reason.

Not ready? One quickly recalls that Larry chose to ignore all class journal prompts in favor of describing his bus rides home with his girlfriend, the one who tried to put her hand down his pants. His entries continued by later noting that "She was probably going to want us to have sex."

Therein lies the dilemma: Do you abandon the child's natural curiosities in favor of the parent's decision? It would surely seem that an exploration of some choices through reading and follow-up discussion is favorable to exploration of the same topics on a school bus. However, if you say so to a parent in descriptive terms, you have violated the student's trust. I can easily find a clear approach if the child is in any degree of danger, but what if that is not clear? As both a child-oriented teacher and a very protective adult, I find this dilemma to be frustrating and constant, and to hold no easy solution.

This Curriculum Is No Bandage

It is also tempting to look at the introduction of these, or any other, realistic novels as a quick adhesive strip applied to a larger social problem. This is not so. We must bear in mind that a book will not, among other ills, cure alcoholism, stop lung cancer, or come close to preventing the spread of AIDS among the adolescent population.

These larger ills must continue to be addressed in a real and immediate way by society's adults, and we cannot expect children to fully participate in finding their solution; although their bodies are large, they are, by every measure, still children. They are our responsibility; we are not theirs. By the same token, they are not the root of our problems and we cannot look to them to participate in solving

them. Perhaps older adolescents, yes... but not middle school children.

This curriculum is designed to offer these middle school children a vehicle for better understanding this confusing society. Providing them with a means of coping is our responsibility, too, for we introduce them to dangers beyond description; we often forget what powerful role models we are. It seems that every major decision children make can cost them their lives: Sex can end in AIDS, weapons are rampant on school grounds and in neighborhoods, smoking causes cancer, drinking can lead to alcoholism.... The list seems endless.

Yes, we must address these issues in real and immediate ways within our society, but in the meanwhile, we must supply our children with some measure of coping. Books and a systematic, objective look at social decision making is a part of that measure, but it is surely not the cure for the problem. Perhaps a portion of that cure lies in a resurgence of ethics and values clarification within our classroom curriculums. With proper discussion, these books can facilitate that effect.

Recommendations for Further Research

The description derived from this study provided an intriguing foundation for immediate, additional research. The following recommendations reflect suggestions for this impending agenda:

1. Conduct a follow-up questionnaire and subsequent interviews with the current group of students at the beginning of their eighth grade year, at the close of first semester, and then again at the end of the school term. This would allow a more accurate description of the internalization of the DECIDE model. It would also note any continued connection between realistic fiction and the use of a systematic approach to decision making.

2. Conduct a longitudinal study which focuses on the interaction of realistic fiction and the social decision-making agendas of young adolescents. This study should involve a full year of reading, discussing, journal writing, and reflecting. It should occur at the sixth grade level, and the students should then be tracked until high school so as to fully assess the incorporation of print into decision making.

I hope to encounter a school in the coming year which will express an interest in this longitudinal study.

3. Conduct staff development training which focuses on the benefits of incorporating realistic fiction into the reading curriculum, with decision-making skills serving as a vehicle for student involvement. Researchers could then work on a long-term basis with the staff to develop, implement, and evaluate an appropriate curriculum. All participants could collaborate in follow-up studies and evaluation with teachers and students to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum.

I am currently serving as an educational consultant to one school and one school system which are both immersed in a renovation of their reading curriculum. Realistic fiction and decision-making skills are a part of their work.

Final Thoughts: A Reflection

I ain't lookin' for prayers or pity
 I ain't comin' round searchin' for a crutch
 I just want someone to talk to
 And a little of that human touch
 Just a little of that human touch...

Tell me in a world without pity
 Do you think what I'm askin's too much?
 I just want something to hold on to
 And a little of that human touch
 Just a little of that human touch...

You might need somethin' to hold on to
 When all the answers they don't amount to much
 Somebody that you can just talk to
 And a little of that human touch

(Springsteen, 1992)

This study addressed a portion of the human touch, and in doing so, it introduced a way in which adolescents can appropriately deal with the realities of contemporary life. It offered a curriculum that proved acceptable, relevant, positive, and enjoyable for the young adolescents involved.

These complex and often insecure individuals eagerly accepted the social world found within the covers of realistic fiction. They discovered that it validated their feelings and helped them to recognize that their diversified levels of

development are universal. By providing a source of contemplation, these books helped to create some sense of illumination for social misunderstanding, common fears, and the pull to peer group conformity. By providing a source of consultation, these books empowered these youngsters, for they found that reading gave them a heightened sense of control over their decision-making agendas. By providing peers and parents, laughter and reality, these books gave these diverse and complex adolescents both "...something to hold on to, and a little of that human touch..."

As a result, these students shared of themselves in a way that people do only when they truly believe in the need for human touch. These were stubborn survivors of an often difficult society. These students believed in the importance of peers, of family, of adolescent rights, of education, of opening their private lives toward the improvement of classroom practices and teacher understanding... and because of these beliefs, they shared in a deep and intimate way, in a way that people do only when they respect and value the universal need for human touch. They knew that their honesty could perhaps make a difference.

The Carnegie Council (1989) challenged middle level educators to restructure current approaches to the teaching of these young adolescents; it challenged teachers to become more aware of the cyclical effects of life and education and the important role that we play in them. We must keep teach our

children well, and we must keep them safe. Many of the decisions which they make in middle school will leave them with no options for the beginning years of their adult lives.

This study successfully addressed the challenge. It found that this combination of reading and reflecting is one way to bring home the certainty of an America which is guided by "...mature young people of competence, compassion, and promise" (p. 17). It is one weapon for the "fateful choices" which our children confront on a daily basis. It is a vehicle for the vision of a "15-year-old who has been well served in the middle years of schooling" (p. 15). And it is, as well, "a little of that human touch" (Springsteen, 1992).

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Evaluation of the Study: Eisner's
Connoisseurship Approach

TEACHER EVALUATION OF THE STUDY Eisner's Connoisseurship Approach

A powerful approach to program evaluation, educational connoisseurship and criticism is one of Elliot Eisner's most noted contributions to the field of evaluation. The summation of his argument for a connoisseurship approach rests on his belief that "in many important areas of human activity, the judgment of experts is relied upon because the features that matter in those fields cannot be quantified or dissected 'scientifically'" (McLaughlin & Phillips, Eds., 1991, p. 168). He notes that it is, in fact, "...the qualities that evade measurement (which are often the) key" to a richer depth of understanding (p. 168).

This researcher agreed that "the judgment of experts" is most valued when one is evaluating any aspect of education, and it was this agreement that led her to select Eisner's guidelines as those most suitable for evaluating this study.

Eisner clarified the connoisseur as one who has a wide background of expertise in the subject at hand, and who has a depth of both theoretical understanding and educated taste. Simply put, "the connoisseur is someone who knows what he or she is looking at, or listening to, or reading" (p. 174). This person can be relied upon for her/his outstanding judgments and as a guide to what factors must be considered and served. This public sharing of expertise takes place in the form of criticism.

Eisner finds that criticism helps one to "re-see, that is, to see in a new way" (p. 175). There are four aspects of this re-seeing: description (sharing a vivid picture), interpretation (what an event means), evaluation (value judgments about the importance of something), and thematics (the particular case studied has implications that extend into other cases and situations).

Eisner bases his argument for a connoisseurship approach to evaluation on the fact that qualitative techniques have taken their place among the most respected of today's educational research methodologies. He therefore advocates for a more artistically grounded level of inquiry.

The connoisseurship approach was employed in this research study. Janelle Timmons, the classroom teacher, was the connoisseur whose expertise was solicited. This label is appropriate based upon Mrs. Timmons's 15 years of experience in the classroom and the numerous educational recognitions that she has received on both local and state levels.

She was asked to evaluate the study in the traditional written form which was suggested by Eisner. Her guidelines for evaluation included the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics which he deemed necessary for a thorough evaluation.

TEACHER EVALUATION OF THE STUDY
based on Elliot Eisner's Connoisseurship and
Criticism Approach to Educational Evaluation

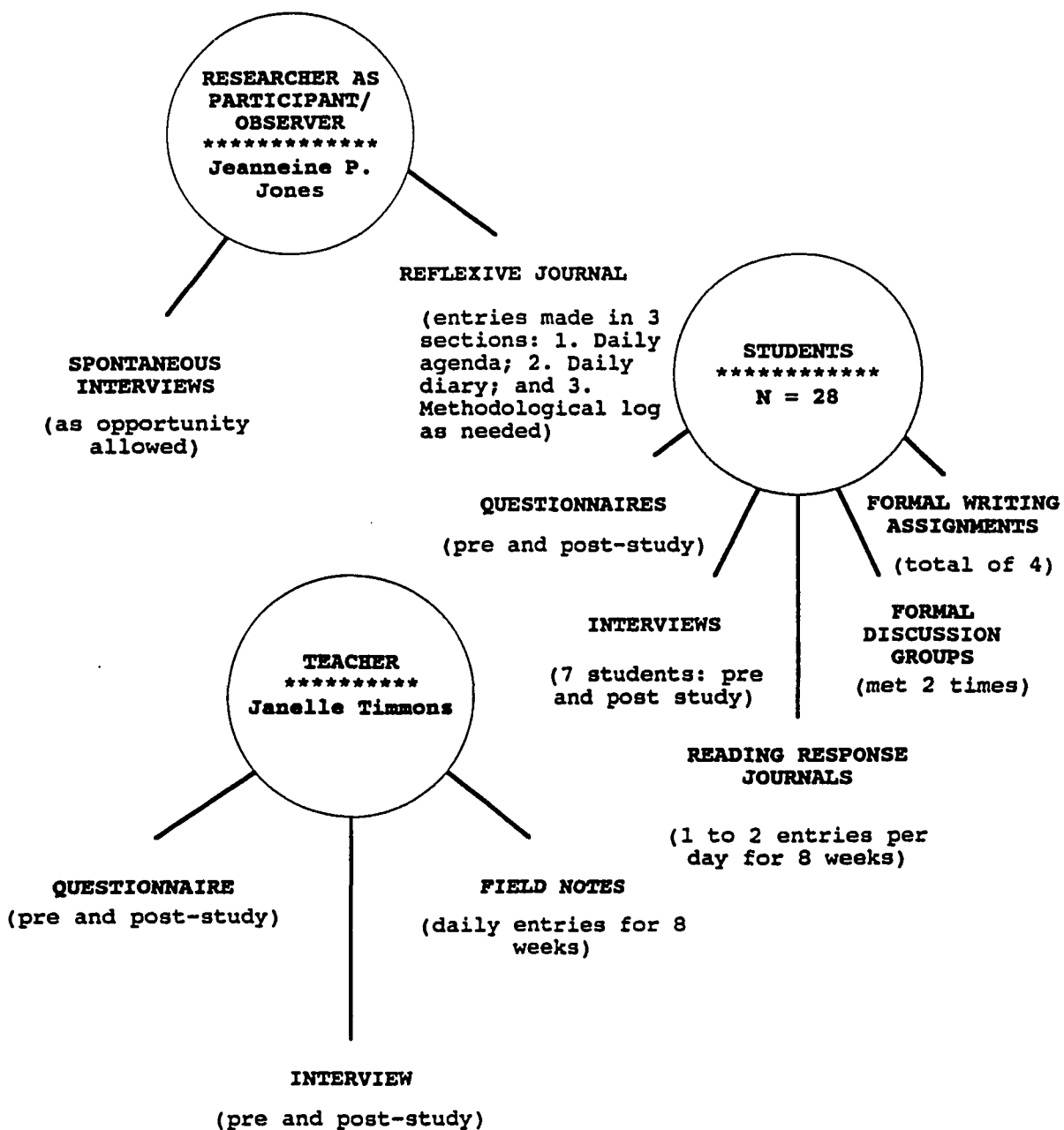
Please write a detailed evaluation of the completed study. Include all comments and observations that you deem important to either the evaluation of this study, or its relationship to other studies which may take place at other times. The following notations will provide focus:

1. Begin with a description of the study as you observed it. Use illustrations, anecdotes, and other bits of color when possible. This will enable others to vicariously participate in the events of the study.
2. Include an interpretation of these incidents which you witnessed. (For example: your reaction to and assessment of the daily agenda and its subsequent events, the students' interactions with the lesson, the role which the researcher played in your interpretations of these events, etc). This will help others to see how these events fit into the lives of the adolescents who participated in the study. It will also reveal both strong and weak links in the study's framework.
3. Evaluate the study by making value judgments as to which things were most pivotal, and by noting things of importance which the researcher perhaps failed to highlight as significant.
4. Finally, review your general thoughts concerning this study, including: curriculum, social interactions among young adolescents, decision making with its myriad sources of influence and resulting dynamics, classroom instructional strategies, etc. What generalizations might any educator glean from this study?

APPENDIX B

Compilation of Data Collection Instruments

COMPILATION OF DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS
 (Duration of study: 8 weeks)



APPENDIX C

Student Questionnaires
(both pre and post-study)

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

NOTE: The following questionnaire was used with the seventh grade students in Mrs. Timmons's reading class. It was completed following the introductory discussion which stemmed from the two children's books, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (Voirst) and The Teacher from the Black Lagoon (Thaler). (See Appendix K for a full accounting of these two introductory activities.

Development of this instrument was based on the questionnaire distributed among 208 middle school students at Guilford Middle and Northeast Middle Schools (Strahan, Jones, Potter, & Nadolny, 1992).

Note that there was an addendum to the post-study instrument (which follows).

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE decision-making situations

Name: _____
Date: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Good afternoon! The following questions require you to think back over some situations that you have found yourself in since you have been in middle school. Please take your time and think carefully. Know that anything that you write on this paper will be kept in the strictest confidence; I promise.

The information that you share will help me determine the types of decisions that you make in your life. This will, in turn, help me to know the directions that I should take over the next few weeks as I work with you in your reading class. I am especially interested in social decisions, which would basically mean temptations or situations that occur when you are with your friends or other people... times when you have to decide if something is OK to do or not.

Please share as much detail as you can. Thanks!

Mrs. Jones

1. Think back to a time when you have been faced with a difficult choice or temptation, one that involved other people

in a social setting (including school). Describe the setting where you were, and then describe the situation in detail.

setting:

situation:

2. What did the other people involved in the situation expect you to do?
3. How did you feel when you realized their expectations?
4. What did you finally decide to do?
5. Describe in detail what you thought about while you were making your decision (if anything).
6. What did you learn from the experience?
7. If you could do the whole thing over again, would you change anything?
If so, what would you change?
Why would you change this?
How would you do it differently next time?
8. Do you ever consult sources outside of yourself when you are faced with a difficult decision?
Who or what are these sources, or people/places where you go for guidance?
9. List the most common social decisions that you think a middle school student at this school has to make on a regular basis. Name as many as you can, but be sure you actually know people who have been in these situations, or make certain that you have faced them yourself.
10. Are there additional situations that you know you'll encounter when you get to Western High School (or the high school of your choice)?
What are some of these common situations or temptations?
11. How do you feel about reading?
How much time do you spend reading just for fun (on a daily basis)?
12. Please share anything else that you would like for me to know.

SECOND STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE
adolescent decision making

NOTE: The following addendum appeared with the second distribution of the student questionnaires. This was done in response to things which had been building in class, including a student evaluation of the study.

Name: _____
Date: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Please complete the original questionnaire based only on things that have happened to you during this study, which would be the last eight weeks (from about one week before Easter break until now).

Please complete these additional questions as a type of study evaluation:

1. TEACHING READING TO MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

A. What is the most common approach to reading instruction that your teachers have used over the past two or three years?

B. If you were a reading teacher, how would you teach this subject? (For example: What kinds of materials would you use? Would you read aloud or silently? Would your students read aloud? etc.)

C. What is your favorite reading material?

D. Do you plan to read much over the summer?

E. If yes: What will you read? If no: Why won't you read?

2. THIS STUDY

A. Please tell me your favorite things about teaching reading the way we have done during this study.

B. What things did you not like? (Beside of each one, tell me how I can make this better the next time.)

C. Name some things that you've learned that you might use later, outside of this classroom.

D. If you could give this study a grade, what would it be?

APPENDIX D

Copy of Interviewer's Contract
and
Protocols for Both Student and Teacher Interviews

AGREEMENT TO CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

for dissertation study
directed by
Jeanneine P. Jones

(Interviewer's name), the undersigned, has agreed to interview seven students in Mrs. Timmons's class. Each of these students will be interviewed two times, the first interview being conducted the week of April 27, 1992, and the second the week of May 25, 1992. Mrs. Timmons will be interviewed twice, as well.

The researcher will supply the interviewer with both interview questions and a tape recording system for each of the sessions. The interviewer has agreed to make notations at the close of each interview as to body language or any unusual behaviors on the part of those interviewed.

(Interviewer's name) has had prior interviewing experience with Elon College. She will be paid \$50.00 at the conclusion of each of the two sessions (April and May) for a total of \$100.00.

I agree that this document is correct, and that I will indeed conduct the described interviews in both April and May.

signature

FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Students interviewed:

Alan Thompson
Misty Smith
Larry Johnson
Liberty Layton
Buck Cannady
Sinthia Myer
Michael Burnette

II. Teacher interviewed:

Janelle Timmons

III. Instructions to the interviewer:

- A. According to the study's proposal, the purpose of this protocol is twofold: 1. To delve into the decision-making agendas of the seventh graders in this classroom; and 2. To note their responses to fictitious characters in regard to the characters' decision-making skills.

Therefore, this interview process will involve selected members of this classroom. It will also include their teacher. She will supply personal observations as to decision making among middle grades students, with this class highlighted.

- B. I have designed the questions so that the students will begin by discussing a character in the first novel that we are reading. This should allow them to establish a comfort zone with the entire interview procedure, before moving on to more personal ground.
- C. Please read each question slowly, and be conscious of good wait time after each. Ask all seven of the questions provided; however, I want to make certain that the tone stays informal. Therefore, if a student deviates from this track... great. Just let her/him talk about personal observations and interests, so long as s/he stays on the topic of decision making, either through Self or literature. (If s/he is really far afield, just politely comment as to the conversation, as you do when you want

someone to wind down. Then go on to the next question.)

- D. I have provided prompts for those students who may hesitate or supply curt responses. If these do not work, simply move on to the next question. If you feel that the student is puzzled, offer to repeat the question.
- E. Please use both tape recorders (in case one does not work well.) Please also make notes after dismissing each person (Did s/he appear relaxed? truthful? Did any aspect of the questioning seem to make her/him nervous? ...plus any other observations that seem at all important.)

I have provided a copy of the protocol for each person interviewed. Feel free to make notes on these as you go along, and at the interview's conclusion, as they seem necessary.

- F. Please begin by: Welcoming the student, thanking her/him for agreeing to participate, explaining that you will be asking several questions, and urging her/him to discuss or explain feelings and concerns that go beyond the questions asked. (I would like for her/him to feel comfortable enough to carry on a conversation, rather than supplying terse answers to a few questions; I suspect we will see more of this in the closing interviews.)

In light of this desire, you should feel free to add your own prompts when they seem necessary, or when you sense that the student would like to talk further, but is hesitant.

Many thanks!

IV. Questions to ask STUDENTS:

- A. Let's talk for a minute about Dale, the main character in Who Invited the Undertaker? Do you think he represents a pretty typical seventh grader as far as his worries and homelife and relationships go? (Wait for YES or NO response.) Please talk a little about why you feel this way.
- B. Do you think he finds himself in situations that are pretty typical of the ones you find yourself in? (If s/he doesn't respond, assume that s/he can't remember specific examples. Then say, "Remember

that he finds himself living with only one parent, feeling responsible for his younger brother and sister, wanting to catch a girl at school that didn't like him back, and several other similar things.")

(If response is YES... What other situations do you find yourself in that Dale has either experienced, or could possibly experience based on things that are typical for seventh graders?)

(If response is NO... How are yours different?)

- C. Do you think that he usually made good decisions or poor decisions? (Wait for response... probably GOOD or POOR.)
Explain why you think this.
- D. Do you think that you usually make good decisions or poor ones? (Again, wait for response.)
Explain why you think this.
- E. Think about a decision that you have recently had to make. Talk a little about how you arrived at your final decision.
(If student does not immediately respond, assume that s/he has not really pinned down a process that s/he follows when making decisions. Then ask, "Would you like for me to give you a few examples?" If YES, say, "For example: Did you consult anyone or anything for advice? Did you spend a long time thinking about it? or perhaps, Did you just let the decision happen to you rather than planning for it?")
- F. How comfortable did you feel with your decision once it was made?
- G. Members of your class listed several different things when asked to name common social decisions that a middle school student has to make. Remember that this listing was to be based on situations that had either happened to the person or to someone the person knows. This list included, among other things:
- smoking
 - chewing tobacco
 - cheating
 - skipping school or classes
 - taking drugs
 - drinking alcohol
 - whom to date
 - whom to be friends with

running away from home
having sex

Do you think this list is accurate, or correct in that it lists common social decisions faced by middle school students?

(If no... What would you add or eliminate to make it more accurate?)

Say: This concludes our interview. Is there anything else that you would like to add? Thanks very much for your time and for your honesty.

V. Questions to ask TEACHER:

- A. Based on past experiences and observations, describe a "typical" adolescent.
- B. Can you zero in a little on female cliques and male cliques among middle school adolescents?
How important are dating relationships?
Please talk a little about the dynamics of the typical relationship.
- C. How do other things factor into the adolescent agenda; for example, home, media, education, teachers, etc.?
- D. Talk a little about some of the decisions that you feel commonly confront the typical adolescent whom you've described.
- E. Where do you think this typical adolescent turns for guidance and advice when faced with the most difficult of these decisions (if anywhere)?
- F. Do you find this typical adolescent to be:
goal-oriented?
realistic?
consequence-aware?
- G. Is there anything else that you'd like to add to this interview? Please say: Thanks very much for your participation!

SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- I. Students to be interviewed:
 Alan Thompson
 Misty Smith
 Larry Johnson
 Liberty Layton
 Buck Cannady
 Sinthia Myer
 Michael Burnette
- II. Teacher to be interviewed:
 Janelle Timmons
- III. Instructions to interviewer:
- A. As in the first set of interviews, please use appropriate body language and probes in order to encourage the participants to share as many of their thoughts as they would like. Please also make any notes about student/teacher body language (etc.) which might later be of interest.
 - B. You will note that the questions asked are basically the same as with the first interview, though I have made a few necessary changes. (For example: The first interview began with specific questions concerning the first novel that they read together in class. It would not be appropriate to continue to ask questions concerning the first book when we have read several more since then.)
 - C. Note, as well, that I have included copies of several of the books that we have been reading. I thought that having them on a table might help prevent their drawing a "blank" about which books they have actually read, characters in them, etc.
- IV. Questions to ask STUDENTS:
- A. Please share with me some of your thoughts about the characters in the books that you've been reading in class.
 Probes include: favorite book?
 favorite character in that book?
 Now tell me about that character.
 Is there another book you'd like to also talk about?
 - B. Tell me a little about some of the problems that these characters had to deal with.

Are they the same types of problems that you and your friends have to deal with?

Share some specific examples of a couple of these problems that are the same as some of yours.

- C. Do you think that most of these characters made good or bad decisions (in general)?
 Explain why you think this.
 Please give me an example of a decision that one of them had to make. Was it good or bad?
 How did s/he make that decision (thought about it, just let it happen, friend made it for them, etc.)
 Why do you think it was a (good) (bad) decision?
 What would you have done if you were the character and you had been in that situation?
- D. Do you think you usually make good or bad decisions?
 Explain why you think this.
 Please think of a decision that you've recently had to make that involved some type of a social situation.
 Talk a little about how you arrived at your final decision. (For example: Did you consult anyone or anything for advice? Did you spend a long time thinking about it, or did you just let the decision happen to you instead of planning for it?)
 How comfortable did you feel with your decision once it was made public to your friends, or to the other people who might have been involved?
 What advice would you give to another person your age who was facing the same situation?
- E. Have you learned anything special over the last eight weeks that you might use later when you've got a hard decision to make?
 (If no: fine.)
 (If yes: Please talk a little about what you've learned that might help you out later.)
- F. What else would you like to add that I haven't thought to ask you?
- G. Thanks very much! This concludes our interview.

V. Questions to ask TEACHER:

- A. Please share with me some of your thoughts concerning young adolescents, ages 10 to 15.

How do you think most of them approach decisions that they must make?

What are some of the things that influence their decisions?

- B. Based on your observations, how do you think the typical middle school teacher approaches reading instruction in the reading classroom?
Do you think teachers outside of the reading classroom feel like this is their responsibility? Should it be?
Why do you feel this way?
- C. What advice would you give to someone who is just starting out as a seventh grade reading teacher?
- D. Talk about this study from the perspective of an experienced seventh grade teacher (including, but not limited to, reading instruction). You may want to consider such things as:
 - 1. the curriculum
 - 2. specific illustrations about the students
 - 3. methods of presentation and instruction
 - 4. study in conjunction with the way typical kids approach social situations (Is it relevant? beneficial?)
 - 5. strengths of study
 - 6. weaknesses of study
- E. What else would you like to add?
- F. This concludes our interview. Thank you!

APPENDIX E

Reading Response Journals

READING RESPONSE JOURNALS

General information as it was addressed to the students:

1. Each student will keep a reading response journal as a part of the study. These daily entries will be housed in a stenographer's pad which will be supplied by the researcher. Each day's entry should be dated.
2. Entries may be made at any time during the reading period, though specific time will be given at the start of each day. Recordings can be based on either books read at home or those read in class. Yellow index cards will be supplied for the purpose of making notes while reading at home, and then these notes can be developed into full entries the next day. (Or entries can be written at home on the cards and stapled into the pads the next morning.) Additionally, journals will be stored in a crate at the front of the class. This will lend access to them at any time during the day should the student wish to make entries aside from the reading period.
3. All writings will be treated as private conversations between the student and the researcher. Students may opt to submit them at the end of a particular class for immediate written feedback; if so, they will be returned at the end of that day. Additionally, all journals will be collected each Friday for weekend data analysis.
4. All journals will become the property of the researcher at the close of the study (though students may photocopy entries if they wish).

APPENDIX F

Protocols for Group Discussions

PROTOCOL FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

NOTE: The following document was shared with the seven groups on the day that round one reading was due, and again when round two reading was due. Groups were encouraged to sit together for the entire period, though the first portion of the discussion was completed individually. The researcher sat in on a portion of each group's discussion.

Name: _____
 Date: _____
 Novel read: _____
 Other members of group: _____
 1.
 2.
 3.

RESPOND INDIVIDUALLY AND WITHOUT COLLABORATION:

1. Write a brief summary of the book, including the title and author.
2. Write a brief sketch of the chief character. Add a second paragraph where you compare and contrast this person to yourself.
3. Describe a situation in which the main character had to make a difficult decision (one which you personally deem important or hard).
4. What did s/he do?
5. What would you have done in this same situation?
6. Did s/he use any kind of systematic approach to making this decision? If yes, explain it.
7. How would you have arrived at your decision?
8. How is your process different from the main character's?
 How is it similar?

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING WITH YOUR GROUP. Each person should record the answers on her/his sheet, but you may all have the same answers based on your discussion.

9. Discuss your answers to questions 3 through 8 in your group. Answer questions 10 through 15 based on this discussion.

10. Does your group think that this character is pretty typical, or realistic for her/his age? How or why not?

11. Is the main character a good decision maker?

12. What other situations did the group find important, besides the one you chose in number 3? List them here.

13. Share the decision that resulted from each of the situations listed in number 12.

14. Discuss your responses to questions 5, 7, and 8. How do your responses compare to the other 3 members of your group?
with person A:

with person B:

with person C:

15. Summarize your group discussion to question 14 by noting how this group response compares to the novel's character. (In other words: Is your group basically similar in response or different, and how?)

Do you think this character would fit well in your reading group?

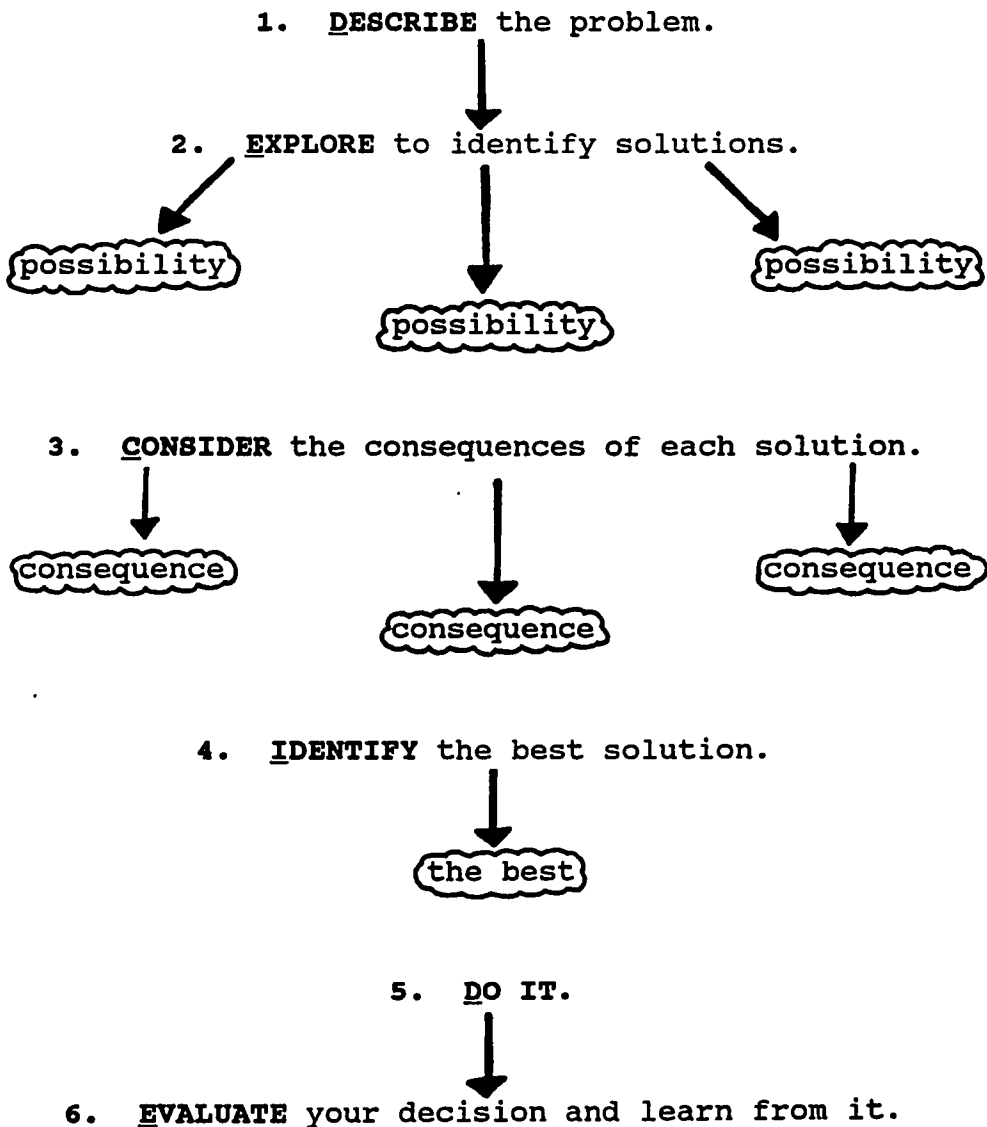
Why or why not?

APPENDIX G**The DECIDE Model for Enhanced Decision Making
and
MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN**

source: Durrant, L., Frey, D., and Newbury, K.
(1991). Discover skills for life. San Diego, CA:
Educational Assessments Publishing Co.

THE DECIDE MODEL FOR ENHANCED DECISION MAKING

Let's look at the following model as a guide to better decision-making skills. We'll apply it to both literary characters and ourselves. Note that the first letter of each opening word spells DECIDE, which is the focus of our study!



MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN

Use the following as a structured way of evaluating the decisions that the characters in the story are making. We'll also talk about this as a way of making decisions in our own lives.

STEP 1: DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM.

STEP 2: EXPLORE DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS.

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

STEP 3: CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES. (Connect these with the solutions that you listed in Step 2.)

FOR A:

FOR B:

FOR C:

FOR D:

FOR E:

STEP 4: IDENTIFY THE BEST SOLUTION.

STEP 5: DO IT.

STEP 6: EVALUATE YOUR DECISION.

APPENDIX H

Formal Writing Assignments

FIRST FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT

NOTE: The following prompt was discussed and distributed at the beginning of the study. Each student responded over a two-day period, and the subsequent writings were analyzed by the researcher for emerging themes and points of interest. The focus was found in the first research question: How do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors which influence their choices?

Name: _____
 Date: _____
 process approach
 ink
 your best work!
 due in two days
 loose-leaf notebook paper (wish name)
 Staple sheet to the front (real name).

Discuss decision making in a very personal way. Illustrate your writing with anecdotes, or examples.

(My suggestion is that you view this as an opportunity to compile all of the bits and pieces of your personal beliefs that we've been writing about and discussing for the past few days. You may want to address the prompt by: 1. Describing a social dilemma or situation that you've been involved with in the past; an alternate suggestion might be to picture yourself in a situation that you've heard a friend discuss or that you've seen on television. 2. Then you might discuss how you arrived at your decision, and 3. What the final decision was.)

SECOND FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT

NOTE: The following prompt was discussed and distributed at the close of the second class novel, On My Honor by Marion Dane Bauer. Each student responded over a two-day period, and the subsequent writings were analyzed by the researcher for emerging themes and points of interest. The focus was found in the second research question: How do young adolescents describe young adolescent characters in selected realistic fiction?

Name: _____
 Date: _____
 process approach
 ink
 your best work!
 due in two days
 loose-leaf notebook paper (wish name)
 Staple sheet to the front (real name).

Consider the novel that we have just completed, On My Honor by Marion Dane Bauer. Zoom in on the characters of Joel and Tony, and address the following questions in your writing. Please include specific portions of the story as illustrations.

How realistic are these characters as compared to how you know life to really be? They are entering the seventh grade, and thus you can judge them by yourselves and your friends.

Evaluate them as decision makers. Look at each one separately, and then consider their influence on each other. How does their style of decision making compare to your own?

THIRD FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT

NOTE: The following prompt was assigned during the reading of the second round of books chosen individually by the students. Each child was given a three-day period for completion, and the subsequent writings were reviewed by the researcher as part of the on-going data analysis. Focus was provided by the third research question: When presented with a systematic framework for making decisions, how do young adolescents apply this framework to the analysis of situations in realistic fiction?

Name: _____
 Date: _____
 process approach
 ink
 your best work!
 due in three days
 loose-leaf notebook paper (wish name)
 Staple this to the front (real name).

Listen carefully to the excerpt from Cynthia Voigt's novel, Izzy, Willy-Nilly (Note: Researcher read Chapter 2 aloud). At the close of the reading, discuss these questions with a group of 2 or 3 of your classmates.

1. Healthy decision making depends on good information. What misinformation influenced Izzy's decision to ride with Marco?
2. Did Izzy experience any peer pressure in the story? Discuss.
3. What needs, wants, and values influenced Izzy's decision?
4. What long-term effects does Izzy have to face because of her decision to ride with Marco?
5. Imagine that you are Izzy in the story. Write a plan that describes how you might go about making your decision (Durrant, Frey, & Newbury, 1991, pp. 210-213).

Focus on question number five. With your group, complete MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN as if you were Izzy. Be sure to include as much factual information as you can from the story, but add your group's suggestions, too. (Perhaps divide your PLAN into two columns and label one side IZZY and one side ME. This

will help you to see how Izzy thought about her decision and how you thought about it.) Once you have completed your PLAN, go back and review it. Think about how you would have reacted to the situation if you had been Izzy.

Finally, write individually about the situation. You might want to incorporate the answers to some of these questions in your work: How would you have thought through your decision if you had been Izzy, and what would your decision be? How do you think you would feel about the decision once you announced it to the rest of the group at the party? How would you feel the next time you saw this group at school? Is there any chance that you might make a different decision if this situation comes up again at a later time? Work these answers into your writing.

Respond to these questions in a separate paragraph: Are these people real to you? Do you think the situations that they find themselves in are realistic, or do they sound too much like a story? (Perhaps consider Izzy, Marco, and Tony.)

FOURTH FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT

NOTE: The following prompt was assigned at the close of the study. Each child was given a four-day period for completion, and the subsequent writings were analyzed by the researcher. Focus was provided by the fourth research question: After a series of lessons that explore decision making using realistic fiction, how do young adolescents describe their decision-making processes and the factors that influence their choices?

Name: _____
 Date: _____
 process approach
 ink
 your best work!
 due in four days
 loose-leaf notebook paper (wish name)
 Staple sheet to the front (real name).

Write a story in which you are the main character (but you will want to make up another name for yourself). Picture yourself in a social setting, one in which you are faced with a decision of some type (either one that has happened to you or one which you think you may confront in the future). Describe the setting, situation, and decision in detail, supplying other characters if you need to.

You may want to use the following list of essential story elements as a guide:

1. What is the setting?
2. Who are the characters? Tell me a little about each one, including the person's name. Weave in their involvement with the situation. Be sure to give more attention to the main character.
3. Introduce a problem. (Be sure to tie each of the characters to it, especially the main character.)
4. How does the main character feel about the problem?
5. What does the main character think about while she or he is facing this problem and trying to make a decision about what to do?
6. What does the main character finally decide to do?
7. How does the main character feel once the decision has been made public?

APPENDIX I
Teacher Questionnaire

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
adolescent decision-making situations

NOTE: The following is a copy of the questionnaire that was completed pre and post-study by Janelle Timmons, the cooperating teacher.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Years of Experience: _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

Good afternoon! The following is a questionnaire which has been designed to lend a teacher's perspective to the social decision-making skills of the early adolescent. Please complete it in as much detail as is possible. Your help is appreciated.
Jeanneine P. Jones

1. List the social decisions that you deem most common among middle school students in general, as you know to be true from your collective years of teaching.

2. Do students ever solicit your help in their decision-making process?

In addition to yourself, what other sources (if any) do you observe students consulting for advice when they are faced with difficult decisions?

3. If possible, describe a recent situation in which you observed a student who was faced with a difficult decision. How would you assess the student's handling of the situation?

4. Discuss your views of adolescents as individuals who are:
goal-oriented:
realistic:
consequence-aware:

5. Describe your observations of adolescent peer relationships.

6. How do you approach reading and writing instruction in the classroom?

7. How would you assess adolescent enthusiasm for pleasure reading?

8. Please share anything else that you'd like for me to know.

APPENDIX J

Questionnaire used in Project Decide

PROJECT DECIDE questionnaire

1. Tell about a recent decision that you found challenging.
2. Describe the situation in detail.
3. Tell what you thought about while making the decision.
4. How did you think it through?
5. What did you learn from the experience?

APPENDIX K

Daily Agenda (and portions of journal and methodological log, all from researcher's reflexive journal)

Attachments to Appendix K include:

1. Parent correspondence: letter introducing the study with invitation to meeting; copy of itinerary followed at meeting
2. Two introductory activities used with students
3. Annotated listing of all novels used in study
4. Sample curriculum for On My Honor (Bauer, 1986)
5. Reading Score Card

DAILY AGENDA

with accompanying entries from
researcher's journal and methodological log
when they enhance understanding of the daily agenda

MONDAY, APRIL 6, 1992

The teacher talked to the students in general terms about the study, and provided them with an opportunity to ask questions prior to the researcher joining the group tomorrow.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 1992

1. Explained the study through UNCG's form for presentation.
2. Distributed the parent letter and overall format for the study. Went over as means of further explanation. (See Attachment 1 for copy of letter that served as introduction to study and invitation to researcher/parent meeting. Also see attachment 1 for copy of agenda used at this meeting.)
3. Entertained questions.
4. Read Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. Showed sample cartoon and distributed art paper. Had students begin their cartoons. Finished for homework. (Note Attachment 2 for both rationale and copy of the assignment.)

FROM JOURNAL FOR APRIL 7

I'm surprised at the fact that I was nervous today! The kids were really great, and were curious about the study. Their teacher had briefly discussed it with them yesterday, so they were anxious to meet me and get the details. We spent the first half of the period going over simple things: Who I was, what a dissertation is, why I wanted to do a study that involved students, and what my curriculum expectations for them would be. I kept emphasizing that they had a choice about doing it or not, and that they would "talk about me behind my back" on Thursday, the day that they would vote about doing the study or not.

We started the second half with the Alexander activity, and they really seemed to enjoy that, though I frankly figured that they were being polite. We'll see tomorrow when they process out their sources of frustration.

Oh yes, the teacher caught one boy selling condoms this morning. Seems he's been doing it all year. The kids told her.

This seems to be a good group of kids. That just underscores the fact that I think they all face tough stuff.

He'd been shoplifting them in order to sell them and make a little money on the side, although it's not the kind of situation where his family can't afford to give him what he needs.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 1992

1. Called for questions and any parent reactions that the students wanted to voice.
2. Explained that some assignments would be graded for their teacher, and that the novels would contain spotlighted vocabulary, comprehension checks, and other things which have been a part of their regular reading curriculum. Thus the researcher would be interested primarily in the decision-making component, and the teacher would be interested in all other assignments.
3. Asked: What is a social dilemma? Shared my definition of a social decision. (Note Definitions section of Chapter I for this word's meaning as it relates to this study.)
4. Shared The Teacher from the Black Lagoon. Began a brief discussion of reputation based on the first of the questions which accompanied the book. (Again, note Attachment 2 for both rationale and copy of the assignment.)
5. Students prepared a few written comments based on the questions which accompanied Teacher. Asked them to remind parents of Thursday's meeting. Asked them to start thinking of a social situation that they recently found themselves in (for questionnaire).

FROM JOURNAL FOR APRIL 8

We clicked! I'd forgotten how great that can feel! They didn't seem overly enthusiastic about their cartoons, and I had to fuss a little to get them to settle down in groups and discuss them. Somewhere in the middle of their processing out with the whole group, I just felt them relax and let it flow. It was great! I'm confident that they'll agree to the study tomorrow, and that they'll open up with some feelings. I've been a little leery of their honestly sharing out some things with me, but now I think that they eventually will.

Their common sources of group frustrations included:

1. Not catching any fish all day
2. Having a lot of homework
3. When parents fuss at you
4. When your favorite team loses
5. When fans of the team you hate brag about them
6. When you run out of hairspray
7. Brothers and sisters
8. When people sell something and you get caught buying
9. When a teacher takes something out on everybody
10. When a teacher plays jokes on you
11. When a teacher makes corny jokes on students

12. School food

13. No break and assigned seats

14. When friends have habits that you hate

Not particularly earth shattering, but a good start.

We read the Teacher book the second half, and talked some about reputation. I decided to make the discussion a brief writing assignment for Friday, because the period ran out and I sensed that they might benefit from the focus on reputations.

The teacher told me that the boy with the condoms came to her today and wanted to talk about it. He mentioned such things as it being immoral. Seems his mom must have discussed it with him last night, and must have really made an impression on him.

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 1992

Note: Researcher did not attend class. This was done so that both students and teacher could freely discuss the week's events and therefore voice an opinion as to participation in the study.

1. The teacher obtained student permission for the study by calling for both questions and concerns, and then asking for a vote (unanimous).

2. Both student and teacher questionnaires were distributed by the teacher and completed. (See Appendix C for student; I for teacher.)

3. The first parent meeting was held. (See Attachment 1 for agenda.)

FROM JOURNAL FOR APRIL 9

I didn't go to class today in order to give the kids a chance to talk about the study with the teacher and then vote. They agreed to participate (100%), and so the teacher distributed the questionnaires for them to complete during the rest of the period.

I hosted the first of the two parent meetings this afternoon after school. Only two mothers came. They were polite, interested, and appreciative, though, frankly, I sensed that one of the two had some type of hidden agenda. I guess that will become clearer in time, if indeed I'm correct. They each took several books home to read and preview.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 1992

1. The researcher began to read aloud, Who Invited the Undertaker? Some discussion followed, as did a listing of vocabulary. Approximately 45 of the 55 minutes were simply spent in reading, and chapters 1-6 were completed. (See Attachment 3 for an annotated listing of all 31 books used in this study.)

FROM JOURNAL FOR APRIL 10

We began the Undertaker book today! They seem to be enjoying themselves, though they weren't very vocal. I didn't really expect them to be, though, and that's why I chose this book for the first of the study. It's entertaining, well-written, and relevant, though the death of a father is, fortunately, not something that the average seventh grader has experienced. I figured that this would give them a chance to discuss the character, think a little about themselves, and basically get to know me better. Hopefully they'll begin to be a little more intimate after we've read one book.

They're so polite! I guess they're still trying to figure me out. Maybe it's the novelty of the dissertation study. All of that jargon is a little mysterious sometimes.

MONDAY, APRIL 13, 1992

1. The researcher read chapter 7, and then stopped for the students to complete and discuss the written assignment which accompanied it. This included an introduction to the DECIDE model for decision making. (See Appendix G for a copy of this model.)

2. The researcher read aloud for the remainder of the period.

3. The second parent meeting was held.

FROM JOURNAL FOR APRIL 13

We simply continued to read the Undertaker book today. The class participated in some discussion, though the book is interesting and they basically wanted to read as quickly as possible. We covered six chapters.

The second parent meeting was this evening at 5:30. One dad came about 5:00 and so I talked with him privately. He wasn't concerned with the nature of the study, but rather with the fact that his daughter was an extremely poor, and disinterested, reader. We discussed retelling the day's reading to him each night (without the daughter's realizing that she was being quizzed). I also explained that she'd have the option of choosing from a variety of reading levels, and that three of the home books would be audio-taped. We agreed to keep in touch about her.

Two other parents came at 5:30. I explained the study and answered their questions. One mom was concerned that her son rarely read, and the other (dad) was interested in the criteria for book selection. Seems he finds kids in his church group to be very disrespectful to both him and one another. He didn't want his daughter falling into that mindset, so we talked about the amount of materialism found in the books and the positive/negative views of parents (stemming from two of his direct questions).

Oh yes, one of the mothers who had borrowed books last Thursday returned them today. She requested that her son not

be allowed to read Are You in the House Alone?, although she didn't want him to know that she had requested this, for fear that it would be the one book that he wanted. I can easily steer him in a different direction. I'll also send her four or five more to read tomorrow. She was not interested in suggesting that it was inappropriate for other kids, just not hers...

TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 1992

1. Appropriate vocabulary for the remainder of the book was introduced and orally reviewed.
2. The class offered a review of all chapters previously read. Again, the majority of the period was spent reading aloud.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 1992

1. All vocabulary was reviewed, and the students were asked to write original sentences with any 15 of the words (vocabulary quiz).
2. The oral reading was continued, with this portion of the class preceded by a review of the completed chapters.

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 1992

No class today... The group was in Charlotte at Discovery Place.

FRIDAY, APRIL 17 through FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 1992

Spring Break

Time was spent analyzing existing data, contacting students for interviews (based on questionnaires), and organizing curriculum.

FROM JOURNAL FOR APRIL 17 THROUGH APRIL 24

Spring Break

One interesting note: I analyzed the questionnaires over this break, selected students to interview, and called them at home for permission. Alan's mom told me that he wasn't in, but that she had something to share. She told me that there had been a recent suicide in her family, and that Alan was still quite upset about it. I mentioned the book Artie's Brief to her, which is a part of the home reading selection. I offered to personally deliver it to her without Alan's knowledge, let her read and assess it, and then tell me if she wanted it removed from the list. She was appreciative.

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 1992

1. All vocabulary was reviewed, as well as the novel's storyline thus far. Continued reading in the novel, Who Invited the Undertaker?
2. The first half of the students selected for interviews stayed after school today, and their interviews were completed. The researcher provided snacks and a ride home for each. (See Appendix D for protocol.)

TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 1992

1. Again, vocabulary was reviewed and reading continued.
2. Appropriate discussion followed the reading.
3. All make-up work is due Thursday for those who have been absent or who hold incomplete assignments.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 1992

1. Reading continued, and the book was finished today.
2. Appropriate discussion followed.
3. Remainder of student interviews conducted after school.

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 1992

1. Reviewed the plot of the novel in preparation for a quiz Friday on the book.
2. Journals were introduced and the first entry was made. Students were encouraged to write about any aspect of the novel that they wished, with a special focus on either the characters in general, or their decision-making agendas in specific. If this did not suit them, they could write about anything in their personal lives that they wished to share with the researcher, especially if it dealt with their own decision-making situations and skills. (See Appendix E for student instructions.)
3. The novel was then reviewed in light of the decisions that were made. A look at the characters followed, as well.
4. The teacher interview was conducted after school.

FROM METHODOLOGICAL LOG FOR APRIL 30

Journals were introduced today, and stenographer's pads were provided for this purpose. The kids were very excited about the pads, but seemed confused as to what they should write. We eventually discussed it, and they noted that they had done very little "freedom of topic" style writing this year, or in years before. In fact, it seems that they have done very little writing at all...ever.

We agreed on a structured journal prompt for each day, with the idea that they could branch out into free-flow territory if they so wished.

FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1992
Quiz on the novel

MONDAY, MAY 4, 1992

1. Journal entry for today: Discuss the character of Dale from a seventh grader's perspective. Is he realistic? Did he make good decisions? Describe his relationships with others.
2. This served as a prelude into the first formal writing assignment. (See Appendix H.) The majority of the period was spent working on a first draft of the assignment.
3. The final few minutes of the class were spent looking over On My Honor, and a small portion of the text was read. (Note Attachment 4 for a full copy of this novel's curriculum.)

TUESDAY, MAY 5, 1992

1. The DECIDE model was reviewed in detail. It will be referenced regularly during the remainder of the study. Students were supplied with copies which were pasted into their journals. A large chart of this model was added to the reading corner in the classroom.
2. The reading continued in On My Honor.
3. A journal entry was made: Discuss the characters of Joel and Tony, just as you did Dale yesterday. From what we have read thus far, would you say that they are good or poor decision makers? Are they ordinary boys... realistic?

FROM JOURNAL FOR MAY 5

Ironically enough, Alan came up after class and told me briefly about the family suicide... an aunt that he was probably close to (though I think that it might just be the tragic nature of a suicide in general, perhaps more so than this individual.) He told me that the reading was beginning to bother him (one of the main characters drowns). I told him to feel free to go to the library when I come tomorrow and to simply check out and read any adolescent novel that he'd like, or to select one from the homework basket, though we haven't officially gotten to it yet.

I then shared a personal story with him about my husband's college roommate, Glenn, who shot himself about three years ago. We talked for several minutes about the feelings that he and Mike had in common, and I encouraged him to write some of those things down for me tonight. I promised that I'd write him back if he did.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 1992

1. Reading continued in the novel.
2. A journal entry was made: Discuss the situation in Los Angeles with the riots and looting. I've seen several adolescents involved in this (on the television). I've even

seen many looting with their parents. How do you feel about their decisions? How do consequences fit into their decisions?

3. A brief comprehension quiz was given:
 - A. Explain the novel's title.
 - B. What does this phrase mean to you?
 - C. and D. Explain two reasons why rivers are dangerous for swimming.
 - E. What kind of father was Joel's dad?

Extra Credit (1 point per correct answer): List the six steps to the DECIDE model:

D
E
C
I
D
E

This quiz served to not only check their reading comprehension, but also to enable me to better assess their ability levels. (I still don't know the kids well.) An overriding concern came simultaneously from Mrs. Timmons and me: This will help the students to realize that class continues, even though a "researcher" is now present. There is an obvious "free ride" attitude that is permeating the situation.

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 1992

1. A second comprehension quiz was given.
 - A. What lie does Joel tell as to Tony's whereabouts?
 - B. What did Joel do as soon as he got home?
 - C. Who helps him with his paper route?
 - D. What did he decide he must teach Bobby?
 - E. What did Joel smell like?
 - F. This smell didn't actually exist; rather, it was symbolic of an emotion. What is this emotion?
2. A journal entry was made: Discuss your own decision-making agenda over the past 24 hours. Have you been confronted with anything difficult? If so, please explain. If not, please turn to any decision that you may have confronted in the recent past and discuss it.
3. The novel was completed. Appropriate discussion followed.
4. Several spontaneous journal entries were made during the course of the day's reading.

FROM JOURNAL FOR MAY 7

Alan did indeed slip me a letter; what a heart-wrenching accounting of a seventh grade boy who is subjected to the consequences of an adult's decision! I'll write him a lengthy reply tonight.

Other than this, the day passed by uneventfully. We finished Honor. (Alan never did choose to leave; rather, he was probably the most attentive person in class. The book really lends itself well to some soul-searching kind of comments.)

FRIDAY, MAY 8, 1992

1. Students referenced and detailed a journal entry that was made yesterday during the reading: After page 49 in the novel... What would you do at this point in the story? What do you predict Joel will do?
2. I used this as a catapult into their second formal writing assignment, and allowed them time to begin these. (See Appendix H.)
3. Noted that home reading also provides a host of decision-making opportunities for the characters. Booktalked these titles and let them each choose one. (Note Attachment 3 for an annotated copy of all novels used in this study. A minimum of 1 novel is to be read by May 28. Extra credit will be given for all additional novels read.)
4. Allowed the remainder of class for writing and reading.

MONDAY, MAY 11, 1992

1. Gave back and went over last week's quizzes as a review of the novel.
2. Collected homework writings; allowed time to share.
3. Went over the section listed as Chapter 12 in the curriculum overview. Accomplished this by discussing:
 - A. What major decisions do you recall from the book?
 - B. Characterize Joel and Tony as decision makers.
 - C. Who had to bear the consequences for each?
4. Read them a scenario involving a friend and the mall. Asked them to respond in their journals. When done, passed out MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN. Asked them to review their journal entries and then patch them into the sheet in order to assess their personal agendas and the spots where they could possibly strengthen them.
5. Continued with discussion until each student's questions were satisfied, and each had been provided an opportunity to discuss the novel.

TUESDAY, MAY 12, 1992

1. Booktalked the novels listed as round one group reading. (See Attachment 3).
2. Students formed groups based on novel selection and began to read together.

3. Journal entry: Evaluate this study! What do you think so far? Be careful to include both strengths and weaknesses. Also, begin to make daily comments about the book which you are reading at home. Remember that the focus is decision making, both in light of the book's characters and your own personal lives.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 1992

1. Reading in groups continued.
2. Journal entry: Several of you noted in your introductory questionnaires that both smoking and cheating were very common sources of temptation for seventh graders. Please comment on each of these. Also, be sure to make an additional note on your at-home reading.

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 1992

1. Reading in groups continued.
2. Journal entry: You also noted in your questionnaires that drinking, stealing, and fighting were pretty constant temptations for you. Discuss these.

FROM METHODOLOGICAL LOG FOR MAY 14

One child, a slower reader, came in today and complained that she was having difficulty keeping her home reading and class reading straight. Good point. I asked the class to consider this and to come in tomorrow ready to discuss this as a possible snag in the process.

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 1992

1. Reading in groups continued. Novels to be completed by Monday, May 18.
2. Journal entry: Finally, you cited occasional drug usage and constant peer interactions as sources of concern. Comment on these.
3. Students reviewed contents of their portfolios, including their formal compositions and their journals. Used as overview of study thus far (and as a review of their grade averages).

FROM METHODOLOGICAL LOG FOR MAY 15

Some students in the class are indeed having difficulty with the two separate titles. I've decided to decrease the home reading required to one novel, while encouraging them to read beyond this for extra credit.

I stuffed their portfolios last night with all of their writings and work. I'm concerned with their grades and assume that a part of that is because it's the end of the year. I'm going to allow them to redo their writings, correcting the

grammatical errors and thus scoring higher. I'll restrict them, however, in that they won't be allowed to rewrite their original thoughts.

MONDAY, MAY 18, 1992

1. Journal entry: Discuss your book's character as a decision maker. Compare this to yourself as a decision maker.
2. Group novel was due today. Protocols for discussion distributed; individual portion completed. (See Appendix F.)
3. Group portion of protocol started.

TUESDAY, MAY 19, 1992

1. Plans partially preempted today by student discussion with Mrs. Timmons.
2. Journal entry: Summarize conversation with teacher.
3. Group discussions from yesterday completed.
3. Round two titles were booktalked and selections were made. (See Attachment 3.)

FROM METHODOLOGICAL LOG FOR MAY 19

Today was the most interesting, and honest, day thus far. I had discussed the business of several not doing their reading homework with Mrs. Timmons. The bigger issue here is the fact that they still seem to look at this as free time, rather than a part of their classroom instruction. I had advocated for beginning no later than February for I felt that this would happen; it's difficult to get kids to be serious when the school year holds only two remaining weeks, and when they don't really know you (or your expectations) anyway.

They were discussing the study with Mrs. Timmons when I got there today. After a long conversation with them, she called me into the room to begin the lesson. I asked them to recap their discussion in their journals so that I, too, could comment on their concerns. As a result, we discussed the following:

1. My conversational vocabulary is too high for them to understand. Example: When I asked them to discuss their class conversation in their journals, I asked them to tell me what I could do to compensate. It seems that they had no clue as to the word's meaning.

2. They had not been given enough free time in class to read the assigned novels, nor had they been given enough time to complete the formal writings.

3. This led into their third point, which is that they do not enjoy, nor will they concentrate on, homework. (Though there are, of course, several exceptions to this statement.)

4. They sometimes don't understand the questions that I ask. (I'm sure this is a direct result of #1.)

5. It's the end of the school year and they are too excited to do such serious work.

6. The majority of them have never really enjoyed their reading classes at all, and thus they have not made pleasure reading a habit.

7. They don't trust me because they don't know me yet, and the things they know they should probably mention in their writings are too personal; they're afraid I'll think less of them if they reveal their flaws. As one girl put it, "We never meant to love you, but now we do."

All of these statements are, to some extent, fair and courageous revealings. I celebrated their sharing them out, and promised them that I'd adjust the last one and one-half weeks so that our activities could better fit their needs.

All in all, it was a good conversation and a very profitable day.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 1992

The school's annual Storytelling Festival was held, and thus no classes met for the day.

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 1992

1. Journal entry: Are you becoming more aware of the decisions that you are making on a daily basis? Make a comment or two on this. Now: Name one situation that you think you'll face in eighth grade that you have not been in before. What kind of decision will be required of you because of this situation? What will you think about when you're trying to decide what to do? Will you consult anyone or anything for advice? What will your final decision be?

NOTE: Class asked if they could expand this entry into a formal writing assignment. It will therefore be connected to the fourth assignment.

2. The entire seventh grade then signed yearbooks for the remainder of the period.

FRIDAY, MAY 22, 1992

1. Journal entry: A. Define the word "decision." B. How many decisions do you think you've made in the past 24 hours? C. Keep a running list of the decisions that you make between now and Saturday at 11:00, which is 24 hours from now (mental number OK). Plan to select two or three of these for your next journal entry, detailing what you thought about while you were making your decision.

2. The third formal writing assignment was made in this manner: The researcher shared an excerpt from Cynthia Voigt's

Izzy, Willy-Nilly. Groups then discussed Izzy's decision and tried to incorporate both her decision-making agenda and their own into MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN. They then were to flesh out what they would have done for their writing assignment. (One group was video taped for later use as a member check.) (See Appendix H for writing assignment.)

3. The students chose between silent reading in the round two novel or working independently on the drafts for their writing. Both writings and novel due next Tuesday.

FROM JOURNAL FOR MAY 22

Last Friday's discussion continues to be one of the most profitable that we've had thus far. These kids have really taken off with their reading! Perhaps part of it was the fact that it gave them a sense of control over the study??

MONDAY, MAY 25, 1992

1. (Lengthy) Journal entry: First: Talk a little about the list of decisions that you made between reading class on Friday and the same time (11:00) on Saturday. Concentrate on two or three. What were they and what did you think about while you were making each decision? Second: Can literature have any bearing on your personal decision-making agendas? If no, why not? If yes, how would you use it to help you make better decisions?

2. Round two novels were due. Individual portion of discussion sheet completed on these. (See Appendix F.)

3. Group discussion started.

4. Fourth writing assignment made. Due Thursday. (See Appendix H.)

TUESDAY, MAY 26, 1992

1. Journal entry: Respond to the round two novel in any way that you'd like (characters, decisions that they made, personal connection with the theme, etc.).

2. Answered any questions that they had about the final writing assignment which was made yesterday. Due Thursday.

3. Asked them to share out any feelings or reading recommendations about the round two novels. Finished the group discussions.

4. Discussed Gary Paulsen and a few of his other works, and then Mrs. Timmons began reading orally, The Boy Who Owned the School.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 1992

1. Journal entry: Make an entry on any topic of your choice. It can reference the reading in which you're currently involved; anything on decision making that you've read,

experienced, or perhaps witnessed on TV; or anything else that you'd like to share.

2. Teacher continued with The Boy Who Owned the School.

3. Home reading due by tomorrow, as well as any additional novels that they've been reading for extra credit.

4. Half of the 7 students were interviewed after school (as in the beginning of the study. Rides home and snacks were furnished by the researcher).

THURSDAY, MAY 28, 1992

1. Journal entry: Talk about the people who are most important to you. Journals were collected today.

2. Reviewed all annotated reading lists of novels which students received at the beginning of each round of reading. (See Attachment 3). Students paper clipped these all together and turned them back in to the researcher. These will have additional titles and materials added to them, and then they will be returned to the students next Tuesday, the last day of school.

2. Asked them to begin thinking back over the past eight weeks for suggestions as to strengths and weaknesses of the study, favorite part, assessment of it as a reading curriculum, etc. Evaluations will be distributed tomorrow, as an addendum to the final questionnaire.

3. Distributed copies of the Reading Score Card and Extra Credit sheets. (See Attachment 5 for copies of these.)

4. Mrs. Timmons continued in The Boy Who Owned the School while they finished their Reading Score Cards and Extra Credit sheets.

5. Remainder of student interviews conducted after school.

FRIDAY, MAY 29, 1992

1. This was officially the last day of the class, although Monday and Tuesday will offer opportunities for final spontaneous interviews and such. (Additionally, Wednesday through Friday of next week will be spent with Mrs. Timmons: doing a final member check with her as to my perceptions of both students and teacher, reviewing curriculum, etc.)

2. Distributed their questionnaires and individual grades for the six weeks marking period. Allowed time for individual conferences about the grades while the class completed the questionnaires.

3. When questionnaires were completed, Mrs. Timmons continued (and finished) The Boy Who Owned the School.

MONDAY, JUNE 1, 1992

1. Field Day for the school. Used brief time in morning before the activities started to do a final member check in the form of spontaneous interviews with a few of the students.
2. Conducted one close-out interview with four girls who had read Peck's Are You in the House Alone?, which is about acquaintance rape. Was interested in their opinion as to its relevance to middle school students.
3. Final teacher interview conducted.
4. Gave Mrs. Timmons evaluation sheet and instructions, plus reviewed the rationale behind Eisner's approach to connoisseurship and criticism in educational evaluation. (See Appendix A.)

TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 1992

1. Last day of school for the year! Used it as an opportunity to distribute manilla envelopes to the students. Each one contained the following: a thank-you letter, a copy of one of the study's novels that the student had indicated s/he would like to have as a gift, two snacks, and the reading lists which the students had returned on Thursday, May 28.

These reading lists had been stapled together and a suggested list of eighth grade books had been added, as well. I reviewed a list of which books were available at particular branches of the local public library (summer reading). Also included in the packet was a story on the murder of Lois Duncan's daughter. This had already been a high-interest article for the students, as it pointed to the fact that several of Duncan's mystery books perfectly paralleled her daughter's murder, including Don't Look Behind You, which was included on the home reading list (Woman's Day, June 1992).

2. All novels not given to the students were left with the classroom teacher as a special way of saying thank you. (I also left her a leather book bag and the promise of a bound copy of the final dissertation.)
3. Addresses were double checked with each student so that a summary of the study could be mailed to each family.
4. Mrs. Timmons submitted her evaluation of the study.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3 THROUGH FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 1992

1. Met with Mrs. Timmons to discuss data and conduct teacher-researcher member checks of the final data analysis.
2. Discussed her final evaluation of the study.

**ATTACHMENT 1: PARENT CORRESPONDENCE
AND AGENDA FOR PARENT MEETING**

NOTE: The following packet of information was sent to parents prior to meeting with them. It included a UNCG research permission form, which is not included here.

205 Westover Drive
Elon College, N.C. 27244
April 7, 1992

Dear Parents:

Good afternoon! I'm writing to ask for your help in a dissertation research study that I am conducting through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. My area of interest involves literacy development in children, and particularly in the young adolescent.

Having taught in Alamance County for the past 15 years, with 12 of those being at Western Middle School, I feel that I know many of you and your families. I've been a member of the 8th grade team of teachers at this school for the total of those years, with my areas of concentration being in the language arts, social studies, and reading arenas. I am currently on educational leave from my classroom in order to complete a doctorate this year in Curriculum and Teaching. I'd like to ask your permission to gather my research data from your children, who are the members of (Janelle Timmons's) reading class.

It has long been my observation that middle school students are much more interested in the social than the academic facet of their development, and it has additionally been an observed struggle to get students to read on a regular basis, both for assignments and for pleasure. My study combines these observations into a classroom curriculum that involves adolescent social decision making and the reading of contemporary young adult fiction, both in the classroom and at home.

Using a structured guide to appropriate decision making, I plan to ask students to look at characters in novels, discuss how they approach specific decisions, and then assess if those decisions result in good or bad consequences for the characters. It is my hope that, through careful guidance and appropriate discussion, your children will begin to review their own decision-making processes, and will therefore incorporate an improved process into their personal lives. By

doing so, I feel that this will enhance their own social decision-making skills, and therefore better prepare them for high school and the world beyond.

The students will select from a total of 31 novels, with some being read by the entire class and some being handled in small group settings (Note attached list). The study will last eight weeks, will involve only the reading period, and will comply with all state and county curriculum guidelines. (NOTE: Mrs. Timmons may elect to incorporate some reading and discussion into the advisor/advisee period, since this time slot involves her reading students.)

I have the full and enthusiastic support of the Superintendent of Alamance County Schools, the Principal of Western Middle School, Mrs. Janelle Timmons, and your children. It is my hope to receive your full support, as well. I want to share the curriculum with you and answer any of the questions that you might have as a result. In order to do this, I'd like to invite you into Mrs. Timmons's classroom on either Thursday afternoon from 3:30 to 4:30 (April 9) or Monday evening from 5:30 to 6:15 (April 13). Details will be shared at this time, books will be available for loan, and questions will be answered. Please note that I'd be glad to speak with you over the telephone if these times are not convenient.

There are two attachments to this letter. The first is the previously mentioned listing of books (which are available for you to borrow if you wish). The second is the human subjects form from UNCG, which is a university research requirement; I'd appreciate your completing this. It simply means that I have permission to teach your child.

Many thanks! I'll look forward to seeing you on either Thursday or Monday, or perhaps hearing from you by mail or telephone, either now or at any time during the study (home: 584-9793).

Most sincerely,



Jeanneine P. Jones
Teacher/Researcher

COMPILATION OF ALL NOVELS USED

NOTE: All copies will be provided by either the researcher or the school. Additionally, no student will be asked to purchase anything for this study; all supplies will be provided by the researcher.

Total novels offered: 2 children's books
31 young adult books

TO BUILD RESEARCHER / STUDENT RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST:

The Teacher from the Black Lagoon by Mike Thaler
and
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst

FIRST CLASS NOVEL (together):

Who Invited the Undertaker? by Ivy Ruckman

SECOND CLASS NOVEL (together):

On My Honor by Marion Dane Bauer

THIRD CLASS NOVEL (each student chooses one):

group size limited to 4 or less
Second Star to the Right by Deborah Hautzig
Slake's Limbo by Felice Holman
The Divorce Express by Paula Danziger
Bathing Ugly by Rebecca Busselle
The Boy Who Drank Too Much by Shep Greene
Hatchet by Gary Paulsen
I Know What You Did Last Summer by Lois Duncan

FOURTH CLASS NOVEL (each student chooses one):

group size limited to 4 or less
Students will again choose from the list of 7 titles.
This round will also add the following novels:
The Language of Goldfish by Zibby Oneal
Are You in the House Alone? by Richard Peck

FIFTH CLASS NOVEL (together):

The Boy Who Owned the School by Gary Paulsen

SUGGESTED LIST OF AT-HOME READING MATERIALS:

Students will be encouraged to booktalk additional titles that are their personal recommendations.

The Moves Make the Man by Bruce Brooks

Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice? by Paula Danziger

The Family Under the Bridge by Natalie Savage Carlson

Secrets of the Shopping Mall by Richard Peck

A Day No Pigs Would Die by Robert Newton Peck

My Life in the 7th Grade by Mark Geller

Shades of Gray by Carolyn Reeder

Night of the Twisters by Ivy Ruckman

The Goats by Brock Cole

The Indian in the Cupboard by Lynne Reid Banks

Artie's Brief: The Whole Truth and Nothing But

by Christi Killien

edgar allan by John Neufeld

Don't Look Behind You by Lois Duncan

Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt

Homecoming by Cynthia Voigt

Lisa, bright and dark by John Neufeld

Woodson by Gary Paulsen

One Fat Summer by Robert Lipsyte

Izzy, Willy-Nilly by Cynthia Voigt

AGENDA FOR PARENT MEETING

I. WELCOME

- A. Introduction of researcher by teacher
- B. Researcher's background
 - 1. Fifteen years in middle grades classroom
 - 2. Completing Ed.D. at UNCG
 - a. Curriculum and Teaching
 - b. Focus: literacy
 - c. Special interest in the early adolescent
 - d. Master's Degree in Middle Grades Education
- C. Has been a member of the surrounding community for many years (39)

II. PROBLEM RECOGNIZED BY STUDY

- A. Long been concerned with the fact that adolescents make poor social decisions
 - 1. Share statistics from both Turning Points (Carnegie Council) and North Carolina's response to it, Last Best Chance (SDPI)
 - 2. Reference things kids see on TV
 - 3. Show body images photographed in popular adolescent magazines (example: Teen)
- B. Call for discussion of similar concerns and points of interest from the parents

III. PURPOSE OF STUDY AND AGENDA

- A. To describe how the use of realistic fiction enhances social decision making in middle grades students
- B. In order to accomplish, each student will read 5 books, plus a minimum of 1 from an at-home list.
 - 1. Three titles read orally by researcher and teacher to entire class.
 - 2. Two titles are student choice (from among total of 9 titles).
 - 3. Each deals with adolescents who find themselves facing decisions which are social in nature.
 - 4. Share the titles and a brief review of each, including the dilemma presented in each.
 - 5. Offer the books for loan if any parent wishes to preview.
 - 6. Criteria for selection: Interest levels, social situations common to middle school concerns, readability levels (varied), books not on the sixth and eighth grade reading lists, popular adolescent authors, close to equal number of male

and female protagonists, both good and poor
decision making evident

- C. Focus for curriculum development will involve
1. Four research questions
 - a. How do the students describe their decision making processes, the factors which influence them, and some dilemmas that they deem common to adolescents?
 - b. Discussion of the literary characters found in the selected novels
 - c. How do the students assess the decisions made by the characters in the books? Then, how would they respond if in the same situation?
 - d. Finally, how do they now describe their decision-making processes and the factors which influence them (at close of study)?
 2. State curriculum guidelines will be addressed and respected, and regular reading grades will be collected on this portion of the study (vocabulary, comprehension checks, use of appropriate terminology, etc.)
 3. Only the reading period will be involved (though the teacher may opt to do appropriate follow-up discussion within the Advisor-Advisee group. Some of these students are members.)
 4. A systematic framework for decision making will be employed when analyzing the decisions made by the literary characters. (Share decision-making model.)
 5. Students will be required to read a minimum of one book at home, to be selected from among 19 titles. Three of these will be audio-taped by the researcher.
 6. Data collection instruments
 - a. Students
 1. Questionnaires
 2. Six to eight will be interviewed
 3. Reading journals
 4. Video tapes of discussion groups that will form when students select individual novels
 5. Portfolios of writing assignments and responses not found in journals
 - b. Teacher
 1. Questionnaire
 2. Interview
 3. Field notes
 - c. Researcher as participant observer
 1. Spontaneous interviews
 2. Reflexive journal

IV. OTHER INFORMATION

- A. All data appropriate to social decision making will become the property of the researcher.
 - 1. All materials will be supplied by her.
 - a. Stenographer's pads for reading journals
 - b. Folders for portfolios
 - c. Art paper
 - d. Index cards for making response notes at home
 - e. Other materials as the need arises
 - 2. Students are welcome to keep photocopies of their work if they wish (student expense).
- B. All books have either been purchased by the researcher or are owned by the school.
- C. No student names will be used in the report; rather, each student will be allowed to select a pseudonym.
- D. Parents will be mailed a brief review of the results of the study.

V. QUESTIONS ?

VI. THANK YOU. PARENTS ARE WELCOME TO BORROW BOOKS OR A COPY OF THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL. PHONE CALLS WELCOME AT ANY TIME DURING THE STUDY, OR FOLLOWING IT.

ATTACHMENT 2: CLASSROOM INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

first introductory lesson: based on
 Judith Voirst's
ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD,
 VERY BAD DAY

OBJECTIVES: To establish a sense of trust between the researcher and the young adolescents in order to make the data collection responses as honest and as accurate as possible

To encourage the students to begin the study's required process of personal introspection

To encourage these students to begin viewing literature as something that is relevant to their personal lives, concerns, and frustrations

TIME FRAME: Approximately one and one-half 55 minute class periods

PROCEDURE:

The researcher entered carrying a copy of a childhood favorite, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst. She read aloud the story of a little kid who was having a simply rotten day, maybe the worst ever. In fact, he started to think that a quick move to Australia would not be such a bad idea...

Once she finished reading and had accommodated any discussion or comments which resulted, she passed out strips of paper (whole sheets of white construction paper which had been cut in half lengthwise). She instructed each student to write "Frustration Is..." at the top of the lengthwise strip and to divide the paper into three boxes to form sections for cartoons.

The students then drew things that frustrate them, one per section, and they finished out the sentence at the bottom of each box. (Example: Frustration is... [with a cartoon sketch of piles and piles of books]... having too much homework on a Monday night!) Optional instructions included: "List 10 private things on the back which frustrate you even more." These were kept private between the researcher and the students, although the cartoon side was later posted on the bulletin board.

The group then split itself into subsets of four each, and each smaller group read the strips aloud, making notes of any shared frustrations that they found within their small

group. Each group appointed someone to share these commonalities aloud to the entire group, and commonalities among the larger group were, at that time, noted on the overhead projector by a student.

Once a list of common frustrations had been compiled by the class, the researcher directed the focus to stress among adolescents, and she asked the group to share what they do to relieve frustrated, stressful feelings. The researcher then helped them to work through the list, brainstorming ways in which each item could be handled in order to either eliminate the situation or better accept it.

Next she told them that there are two things that are easy and effective stress reducers in both teens and adults: writing and physical exercise. She asked them to choose one thing on their strip, or an item that the class had generated. They then wrote about the item or situation in a fast-paced, stream-of-consciousness style: what it was, why it was stressful, did it occur often, and ideas as to eliminating or accepting it (about 5 to 10 minutes total writing time).

At the end of the designated time, the researcher asked the students to wad up their papers and quickly throw them away without rereading them. They had therefore purged their systems of the situation and had focused their thoughts toward solutions, yet had not dwelt on the problem enough to become embittered about it, especially if the situation involved other people who surround them on a regular basis.

The strips were posted on a bulletin board at the conclusion of the session. By doing so, the students could share one another's thoughts and could privately continue a healthy discussion which focused on common causes of stress among adolescents.

second introductory lesson: based on
Mike Thaler's
THE TEACHER FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

OBJECTIVES: To establish a sense of trust between the researcher and the young adolescents in order to make the data collection responses as honest and as accurate as possible

To encourage the students to begin the study's required process of personal introspection

To encourage the students to begin viewing literature as something that is relevant to their personal lives, concerns, and frustrations

TIME FRAME: Approximately one-half of a 55 minute class period, to begin at the close of the preceding Alexander lesson

PROCEDURE:

The researcher created a bridge between the preceding and the following lessons in this manner: She asked the students to assess Alexander's perceptions of his day, and she asked them to decide if things were really as rotten as he thought; that is, requiring a move to Australia because life was never going to improve. The answers involved the fact that lots of things are not nearly as bad as we perceive them to be.

Next the researcher read aloud a second favorite, The Teacher from the Black Lagoon. She:

1. Asked the students to assess the little boy's perception of his teacher, before he had actually had a chance to meet her.

2. Created a bridge between this book and life by referencing the word REPUTATION. What is it? How is it created? How easy is it to lose a good reputation, or to perhaps deliberately undermine someone else's? She asked them to think back to a time when they had a poor impression of a person based on either a rumored reputation, or perhaps because they had not yet had a chance to really get to know this person.

3. Created a bridge between these two children's books and the remainder of the curriculum by referencing the eighth grade. She asked: What have you heard it is like? How do your friends expect you to act when you are in the eighth grade? How do sixth and seventh graders expect you to behave? your parents? your teachers? What are some of the social situations and temptations you think you will face when you are in the eighth grade? high school? How will some of these situations affect your reputation? Have you thought much about how you will handle these decisions?

She explained that they would begin to explore some of these situations over the next eight weeks and would discuss some strategies for addressing these decisions.

ATTACHMENT 3: ANNOTATIONS OF ALL BOOKS USED IN STUDY

NOTE: The researcher supplied copies of all titles in the following quantities:

Class novels: supplied 15 copies of each title, with the exception of On My Honor (A full set of 30 copies was owned by the school.).

Group novels for in-class reading: supplied 4 copies of each title, thus limiting the groups to a total of 4 members each.

At-home reading: supplied 2 copies of each title. Three of these titles were audio-taped by the researcher, and duplicates of these tapes were made, thus providing two audio-taped copies each of Woodson (Paulsen), edgar allan (Neufeld), and Night of the Twisters (Ruckman). A print copy of the book accompanied each of the tapes.

Each student received a copy of each annotated booklist at the appropriate time in the study. The lists were compiled at the close of the study in order to produce a summer reading list. (See Daily Agenda entry for June 2, 1992.).

Reading and Interest Levels are provided when known.

CLASS NOVELS

Read and discussed as a group of 28 students.

FIRST CLASS NOVEL

Who Invited the Undertaker? by Ivy Ruckman (RL 5; IL 3-7)

Dale's dad died two and a half years ago, and he's considered himself the man of the house ever since, by default. Though his mom has a good career as a legal secretary, they have heavy trouble making ends meet, especially since his kid sister is Olympic gymnast material and her lessons cost a small fortune. If only he could fix his mom up with somebody out of the personals section of the newspaper, or maybe at the Single Shoppers' Night at the corner market. Too bad she'd never agree, or would she if she didn't know...

(186 pp.)

SECOND CLASS NOVEL

On My Honor by Marion Dane Bauer (RL 5.3; IL 4-7)

Joel's father didn't take his eyes off Joel's face. "On your honor?" he said. "You'll watch for traffic, and you won't go anywhere except the park? You'll be careful the whole way?"

"On my honor," Joel repeated, and he crossed his heart, solemnly, then raised his right hand. To himself he added, "The only thing I'll do is get killed on the bluffs, and it'll serve you right" (p. 8).

Joel and his best friend Tony change their minds, however, and the trip to the park turns into a swimming contest in the deadly Vermillion River. When Tony drowns, Joel refuses to accept it, and he speeds home on his bike, determined to keep the terrible secret to himself.

(90 pp.)

THIRD CLASS NOVEL (read at conclusion of study)

The Boy Who Owned the School by Gary Paulsen (RL 6; IL 5-9)

Based on an experience that Paulsen's son had in middle school, this "love comedy" chronicles the tale of Jacob Freisten. Jacob's main goal in life is to remain unnoticed by everybody: jocks, teachers, and especially pretty girls like Maria Tresser. He succeeds until his English teacher demands that he earn extra credit by working on the set for the school play. Disaster strikes! His developing body and hopping hormones bewilder-- and betray --him!

(85 pp.)

GROUP NOVELS: ROUND ONE
Seven groups of four students each

NOTE: The researcher booktalked the following titles for the class. Students were then allowed to choose one of the books that s/he wanted to read, and thus break-out groups were formed, with each group being limited to a maximum of four students. (These limits were adhered to in that only four copies of each title were available.) Students were encouraged to work with their peers, though any wishes to work alone or in smaller settings were respected.

A copy of this list was provided for the students at the completion of the booktalks and before selection.

Reading and interest levels by grade are provided in parentheses when known.

Second Star to the Right by Deborah Hautzig (RL 7; IL 7-12)

Leslie's New York family is wealthy and doesn't mind giving their daughter everything. However, Leslie can't appreciate this because she is obsessed with her weight; thin is everything. The result is a horrible struggle with anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder that is all too common among today's young adolescents. The School Library Journal gave Hautzig's work a starred review, declaring it "...the best book yet on anorexia nervosa. And it's the only one in which what's compelling is not the heroine's physical condition, it's the heroine herself."

an American Book Award nominee

(151 pp.)

Slake's Limbo by Felice Holman (RL 5; IL 6-10)

Tired of living on the very edge of existence, Slake decides to flee underground to New York City's subway system. He declares this world home for 121 days, as he grapples for firm footing in a hostile society. The New York Times Book Review found Slake's Limbo "...utterly convincing in its detail and moving in its concern and admiration for the stubborn, human will to survive."

an ALA Notable Book; winner of the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award

(117 pp.)

The Divorce Express by Paula Danziger (RL 4.5; IL 7-12)

Phoebe seems to spend a great deal of time riding the Divorce Express now that her parents have split up. Divorce doesn't agree with her, it seems, even though it's done them good. She doesn't fit in at either end of the run. Rosie,

and her mom's announcement, are destined to change things, however. Based on Danziger's own experiences, Booklist commended her "light style laced with humor," while The Horn Book noted her "...sympathetic eye for the ups and downs of her characters and a quick ear for adolescent conversation."
(148 pp.)

Bathing Ugly by Rebecca Busselle (RL 5.6; IL 6-10)

Betsy is new to the business of summer camp. Fearfully overweight but assuming she has potential, she's surprised to learn that the other campers disagree with her self-assessment. Determined to make a statement through the Bathing Beauty and Bathing Ugly Contests, she sticks up for herself in a rather unusual, and courageous, way... The New York Times Book Review called it "a fine first novel for young adults."

(184 pp.)

The Boy Who Drank Too Much by Shep Greene (RL 5.0)

Buff loves ice hockey, and his dad is willing to do anything to help him improve his already incredible game. Since his mom's death, it seems that all his dad has left is Buff's hockey potential, stiff expectations, and alcohol. Buff copies his father's heavy drinking when things get too hard, and his friends decide to intervene.

(157 pp.)

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen (RL 7; IL 5-10)

Brian Robeson has a secret. It consumes him. It constantly plays games in the front of his head, even when the pilot of his single-engine aircraft dies and he is forced to crash-land the plane by himself. It still carries his thoughts along, even though he finds himself desperate to survive alone in the Canadian wilderness for 54 days.

a Newbery Honor book

(195 pp.)

I Know What You Did Last Summer by Lois Duncan (IL 7 up)

Drinking and smoking pot, two couples head to the outskirts of town looking for a good time in a fast car. The accident that they cause that night will come to haunt them, and finally stalk them, as the notes begin to arrive: "I know what you did last summer..." Can they escape?

(198 pp.)

INDIVIDUAL NOVELS: ROUND TWO

NOTE: The original seven titles were again booktalked by the researcher (or if they desired, the groups of students who had just completed them). Two titles were added to the list, these having been saved until now because of their more sensitive nature. The same procedures applied to this round as to the first, although students were encouraged to work and reflect on their own instead of in small groups.

The Language of Goldfish by Zibby Oneal (RL 7; IL 7 and up)

Carrie can't control it any longer, and the roaring noise overtakes her. Her nervous break-down is something that her family can't deal with, however, and they deny it for a very long time, well after Carrie has left the hospital and rejoined them at home. She's bright, artistic, and wealthy. How could this have happened to her? Will it happen again? The turbulence of adolescence is carefully examined in a moving tale.

an ALA Notable Book; an ALA Booklist Editor's Choice:
Best of the Decade
(179 pp.)

Are You in the House Alone? by Richard Peck (RL 5.2)

Gail is frozen with terror. Who's leaving the nasty notes in her locker? Who keeps making the phone calls? She discovers the answers the night she opens the door... and is raped by (her best friend's boyfriend). Terrified, she reports the crime, only to discover that sometimes victims are considered the guilty ones.

ALA Booklist declares, "Peck makes a powerful statement concerning the after-problems -- physical, emotional, and judicial -- that face a rape victim. Emphasis on Gail's emotional turmoil rather than the physical assault will provide an opening for discussion in school and home."

(172 pp.)

SUGGESTIONS FOR PLEASURE READING AT HOME
Outside of Class

The following books supply a varied look at characters who are immersed in a myriad of decision-making situations. Have you read them? If so, you will review them through wiser eyes as you examine the decision-making processes that these characters employ. If not, you will be introduced to a complement of young adults who face many of the same social situations as you. Read their stories and assess the decisions that they make. Examine the consequences that result from these decisions. Are they good? bad? How might they impact your personal decision-making processes?

Keep your reading response journals close at hand, as you will want to jot down your thoughts and feelings while you are reading. Note that three of these novels are audio-taped, and that each tape is accompanied by a printed copy of the novel.

Your classmates and I are counting on you to add your favorites to this list, also, so please plan to do so!

Reading and interest levels are provided when known.

The Moves Make the Man by Bruce Brooks (RL 6.5; IL 7-12)

The Jayfox can handle any moves that life passes his way, from the basketball court to being the first black student in the largest school that Wilmington, North Carolina has to offer. Boy, can he shoot some hoops! He shoots some straight talk, too, when Bix Rivers enters his life. White, insecure, and harboring a family secret, Bix doesn't realize that life has its own set of moves, and thus Jayfox is left to teach him...

a Newbery Honor book
 (252 pp.)

Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice? by Paula Danziger
 (RL 5; IL 8-12)

Lauren feels like her family life is the absolute pits. Her sisters both make her crazy, her parents are too demanding, and she doesn't think she has any rights at all. Enter Zack. Her friends call her a cradle robber because he's younger than she, and so school doesn't provide many good times, either. A special class in the law just might provide her with some answers, though.

(141 pp.)

The Family Under the Bridge by Natalie Savage Carlson (RL 4.6; IL 2-5)

Armand enjoys his homeless life on the back streets of Paris, France. His old baby buggy holds everything that he needs, and he has many friends among the others who find this carefree life appealing. Things change for Armand, though, when he meets the lady who can't pay her rent, and her three red-haired children. Where does his personal pleasure end and his sense of social responsibility begin?

a Newbery Honor book
(97 pp.)

Secrets of the Shopping Mall by Richard Peck (RL 7; IL 7-12)

Eighth graders Barnie and Teresa have never found school very appealing, particularly since they are practically social outcasts. When they find themselves forced to flee from the King Kobra gang, they take refuge in the shopping mall, only to discover that an entire world comes to life after the stores lock up.

(185 pp.)

A Day No Pigs Would Die by Robert Newton Peck (RL 7; IL 6-9)

Fascinating and touching at the same time, this novel is the accounting of one boy's growth to young adulthood. It's about the special bond that welds father to son, and it's about life and death, as well.

(139 pp.)

My Life in the 7th Grade by Mark Geller (RL 5.1; IL 5-7)

Nobody ever explained to Marvin that 7th grade could be complicated! He finds himself: saddled with a best friend who is suddenly obnoxious; failing algebra; tutored by the most beautiful girl in school; and befriended by the class hoodlum. To top it all off, he decides to champion Elliot, who is overweight, overprotected and just too, too nice.

(121 pp.)

Shades of Gray by Carolyn Reeder (RL 4.9; IL 4-9)

The Civil War may be over, but it has cost Will his entire family. He finds himself forced to live with his uncle's family, a man who refused to fight for the Confederate effort. Considering him a traitor, Will is ashamed and resentful of his new situation... until he begins to understand a new kind of courage.

Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction
(165 pp.)

audio-recorded

Night of the Twisters by Ivy Ruckman (RL 4; IL 3-6)

This book relates the account of the night in 1980 that tornadoes torn down the town of Grand Island, Nebraska. It is the story of Dan, his best friend, and a small baby, the courage of community, and the faith that we all must have in one another.

(153 pp.)

The Goats by Brock Cole (RL 6; IL 5-12)

Finding themselves the brunt of a cruel joke at summer camp, this boy and girl become "the goats" for everyone else's hateful fun. Determined to get revenge, Laura and Howie provide a thought-provoking account of survival.

an ALA Best Book for Young Adults

(184 pp.)

The Indian in the Cupboard by Lynne Reid Banks (RL 4; IL 4-6)

A young boy finds himself immersed in a magical world when the small plastic Indian he gets for his birthday comes to life. Totally dependent on Omri for his every need, the tiny Indian paves the way for some amazing adventures!

(181 pp.)

Artie's Brief: The Whole Truth and Nothing But by Christi Killien (RL 4.2; IL 3-7)

Artie may only be in sixth grade, but he's already determined to be a lawyer. Organizing a case to defend a friend puts him in touch with his older brother's suicide and helps him to look at family dynamics through understanding eyes.

(93 pp.)

audio-recorded

edgar allan by John Neufeld

E.A. is brand new and adorable and black. When he's adopted by a white minister's family, the community is less than accepting. Twelve-year-old Michael has difficulty coming to terms with his community's reactions to his new brother. This story focuses on family feelings and the power of peer pressure in adult lives, as well as in the lives of adolescents.

(127 pp.)

Don't Look Behind You by Lois Duncan (RL 6.2; IL 6-12)

April is forced to give up everything: her name, her friends, her town, her school, her life... because her dad has made some legal decisions that threaten their lives and thus put them in line for the government's Witness Protection Program. Danger follows them as they learn to accept one another's failings and come to realize that family is what you make it, no matter where you live. (Note: See Woman's Day, June 2, 1992, for a bizarre accounting of the murder of Duncan's daughter. Although this novel was published earlier, her daughter's murder parallels this book!)

(179 pp.)

Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt (RL 5; IL 5-8)

The Tuck family, granted eternal life after drinking from a magic spring, wanders about trying to live as normal people. When Winnie discovers their secret, they openly discuss their misgivings about the blessings of living forever. Danger lurks near, however, in the form of an enterprising stranger.

an ALA Notable Book

(139 pp.)

Homecoming by Cynthia Voigt (RL 5; IL 6-12)

When Dicey's mother abandons her and her three siblings, she decides to lead them on foot from Connecticut to Maryland, as they track down their grandmother. Once they find her, however, they discover that she is not very pleased to take them in. Doesn't anyone want them?

(318 pp.)

audio-recordedWoodson by Gary Paulsen (RL 5; IL 6-12)

Told as a first person narrative, this book chronicles Paulsen's kindred spirit with the woods, his sled dogs, and all of nature. It is the adventure story of his Iditarod race through frozen Alaska, and the things which he discovers about himself. ALA gives it a starred review, and notes, "Like Jack London, Paulsen combines wild adventure and precise observation with intensely private discovery."

an ALA Notable Book; an ALA Best Book for Young Adults; a Booklist Editor's Choice

(132 pp.)

One Fat Summer by Robert Lipsyte (RL 7; IL 7-12)

Bobby Marks is really fat, and he knows it, and he hates it, but that's just the way it is. The summer of 1952 finds him at Rumson Lake with his family. It brings, among other

things, a yard job for Dr. Kahn, and lots of positive changes in the way of growing up. He comes to realize lots of things about other people, too, and not all of those are so good...

a New York Times Outstanding Children's Book of 1977; an ALA Best of the Best for Young Adults, 1966-1988
(232 pp.)

Izzy, Willy-Nilly by Cynthia Voigt (RL 6; IL 6-12)

Izzy: Pretty, popular, outgoing, a cheerleader...until she decides to get into a car with a date who has had too much to drink. The resulting accident leaves her with only one leg, and with much to learn about the depth of real friendships. Will things ever be the same, or will they always be this willy-nilly?

(262 pp.)

Lisa, bright and dark by John Neufeld

Lisa is 16 years old, and she is worried. She feels strange and wired and crazy, all at the same time. Trying to discuss her feelings with her parents does no good, however, and so she turns to her friends for help.

a New York Times Book Review's "Outstanding Book of the Year"... They proclaim it to be "compassionate and tragic, an indictment of adults who refuse to get involved"

(143 pp.)

ATTACHMENT 4: SAMPLE CURRICULUM

second class novel: Marion Dane Bauer's
ON MY HONOR

a Newbery Honor Book
subject: death of a peer
reading level: grade 5.3
interest level: grades 4 through 7

SUMMARY: Joel's father didn't take his eyes off Joel's face. "On your honor?" he said. "You'll watch for traffic, and you won't go anywhere except the park? You'll be careful the whole way?"

"On my honor," Joel repeated, and he crossed his heart, solemnly, then raised his right hand. To himself he added, "The only thing I'll do is get killed on the bluffs, and it'll serve you right" (p. 8).

Joel and his best friend Tony change their minds, however, and the trip to the park turns into a swimming contest in the deadly Vermillion River. When Tony drowns, Joel refuses to accept it, and he speeds home on his bike, determined to keep the terrible secret to himself.

NOTE: This short novel was chosen to follow Who Invited the Undertaker? (a light comedy) because it provides a progression into a more solemn look at the types of decisions that young adolescents make. It lends itself well to the DECIDE model, while still underscoring the fact that we all approach decision making from different perspectives, and we must therefore individually account for the ensuing consequences.

The entire novel (90 pages) will be read aloud by the researcher, although students may opt to read portions to the class by asking the day before and then reviewing the pages for homework.

OBJECTIVE FOR THE NOVEL: A more in-depth look at decision making through literature, and then life. Particular emphasis on consequences and those who influence our choices

TO BE INTRODUCED DURING THE READING: Detailed implementation of the DECIDE model, the second formal writing assignment, at-home reading suggestions, and stenographer's pads with instructions for reading response journals.

BEFORE READING THE NOVEL

Show the novel, and tell the students that it received the award, Newbery Honor Book. Mention this as being an important recognition. It is given to books which do not receive the Newbery Medal, yet which are especially well-written and appropriate for young adults.

NOTE: It was chosen to follow Who Invited the Undertaker? because it provides a progression into a more solemn look at the types of decisions that young adolescents make. It lends itself well to the DECIDE model for decision making, while still underscoring the fact that we all approach decision making from different perspectives, and we must therefore individually account for the ensuing consequences.

A lesson plan format will follow the same approach as the Ruckman novel, including the fact that the entire novel (90 pages) will be read aloud. (Students may opt to read portions to the class by asking the day before and then reviewing the pages for homework.) No vocabulary will be covered, as the readability is fairly low.

Approximate teaching time: 5 days, including the final writing assignment (which will replace a closing quiz on the novel).

READING THE NOVEL

CHAPTER ONE:

Before reading the chapter, distribute copies of the DECIDE model and review this. (Hang a large chart of it in the room for permanent display.) Tell the students that they will witness several examples of decision making in this story, including one in the first chapter.

After reading the chapter, ask them to note Joel's problem, his hasty decision for resolution, and the fact that his decision depended solely on second-guessing his dad's denial of permission. Page 8 finds Joel's thoughts ending with "The only thing I'll do is get killed on the bluffs, and it'll serve you right." Therefore, he hands his dad not only the decision, but the consequences, as well. Is this fair? Ask students to cite other examples from their personal lives, if possible (handing someone else your decisions without their knowledge, and then blaming them if things go wrong).

CHAPTER TWO:

After reading the chapter, ask the class to name the person who made the decision for both of the boys. Who will have to bear the consequences for the decision? Ask them to

assess Joel (thus far) as a young man in control of his own choices. Call for a few adjectives describing the character of Tony. What do the students predict will happen next?

CHAPTER THREE:

Simply read, emphasizing the challenge that Joel offers Tony.

CHAPTER FOUR:

page 26: Why does Joel somehow feel older? Ask the students if they have figured out why Tony is acting this way.

After reading the chapter, ask the students to make an entry in their reading journals. Using the DECIDE model, ask them to put themselves in Joel's place, and to make a general decision as to what he should do next. (For example: risk his life and dive for Tony? go for help? get his dad? wait to see if it is a joke? simply leave? etc.) After about three to five minutes, ask them to discuss whether they found that assignment difficult to complete. Lead the discussion to the fact that we sometimes don't have time to explore our options. Note that these times are the ones which require practiced, mature decision-making skills, and a willingness to bear the consequences, even when we know that they may be painful.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Simply read, noting that Joel's decision was to dive for Tony. Call for a show of hands from those who also chose this. Ask them to comment on why this took precedent over a concern for their own safety.

CHAPTER SIX:

After reading the chapter, ask them to predict what Joel will do next.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

page 49: last full paragraph... "There was one thing he needed, though. He needed to decide what to tell his parents--and the Zabrinkys--when they asked about Tony." Now that they know the character of Joel, what do they think Joel will tell his and Tony's parents? Have the students make a journal entry in response to this question. Require them to use MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN, filling it in as if they were Joel. Finally, ask them to write a comment or two as to what they would do if this were their own situation and best friend.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
Simply read.

CHAPTER NINE:

page 64: Ask students to list the myriad of emotions that Joel is feeling now (guilty, angry, afraid, hurt, responsible). Note the fact that Joel is left to bear the consequences of Tony's decision. Is his anger over this justified? Ask similar questions that cover the other emotions listed by the class. (For example: Why does Joel feel guilty? Should he? What does he fear? Is this justified? How would you feel? etc.)

After reading the chapter, ask the students to predict what will happen next.

CHAPTER TEN:

page 72: Note that Tony's parents, as well as Joel, must bear the consequences of Tony's decision. Did Tony consider that? Ask two or three students to share times when they have either left someone else to bear consequences for their actions, or when they have been left with someone else's poor decision. Now ask them to note those people who are suffering because of Joel's decision to keep Tony's death, and the circumstances surrounding it, a secret.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:

After reading the chapter, note that Joel tries to transfer his guilt (for his and Tony's poor decisions) to his dad.

CHAPTER TWELVE:

After reading the chapter, again review the DECIDE model. Look at it in terms of the major decisions made in the book, and those who must bear the consequences for each:

1. Joel's decision to second-guess his dad's permission to ride to the park, rather than simply saying he did not want to go.

2. Tony (and Joel's) decision to swim, though the river is forbidden to them.

3. Joel's decision to keep Tony's death a secret, until the arrival of the police forces him to confess.

AFTER READING THE NOVEL

1. **Second Formal Composition:** Address the following questions as you look back over the course of events found in On My Honor. Feel free to incorporate illustrations in the form of events from the book or examples from your personal experience.

How realistic are the characters as compared to how you know life (and early adolescents) to be?

How do you evaluate Joel and Tony as decision makers? How do they compare to the ways in which you sometimes make decisions? (Note Appendix H for a copy of this assignment.)

2. Take note of the following scenario:

You and a friend decide to go the mall; however, when your friend comes to pick you up that evening, you realize that it is not her/his dad who is driving, but a high school student. This student runs in a pretty fast crowd, and your friend has recently started hanging around with it. You would not mind being part of a high school group, but you have a feeling that this group plans to do more than just hang out in the game room at the mall. You know that you can stall for a few extra minutes by saying that you are not quite ready to go. You know you are going to have to make a fast decision. What do you do?

Ask the students to respond in their journals. When they are finished, distribute MY DECISION-MAKING PLAN. Ask them to review their journal entries, labeling each step of the chart with information found in their journals. Stress that they should leave blank any part of the chart not found in the journal. This should begin to focus their attention on portions of our structured plan which they seem to leave unattended.

NOTE: The immediate goal is to encourage students to become more "decision aware." Once this discussion of personal awareness has taken hold, we will return to the decision-making agendas of the literary characters about whom we are reading. Students will then begin to compare the characters' decisions with their own, as they strive to meet the objective of enhanced personal decision-making skills.

ATTACHMENT 5: READING SCORE CARD
Time for a final tally!

NOTE: The following questions were distributed at the end of the study. The objective was two-fold: From a researcher's perspective, I was curious as to the direct connections that students may or may not have made with specific books to which they had been exposed. From a teacher's perspective, it was necessary for the sake of accountability; this was especially true since three of the books were the responsibility of the individuals.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Total Read: _____

List them please:

1. Who Invited the Undertaker?
(Ivy Ruckman)
 2. On My Honor (Marion Dane Bauer)
 3. The Boy Who Owned the School
(Gary Paulsen)
 4. first group book: _____
 5. second individual book: _____
 6. at home: _____
- Add numbers to list any others.

Please complete the following questions:

1. Which was your favorite book?
Why was it your favorite?
2. Write a good, but brief, summary of this book.
3. Tell me about the main character(s) in this book.
4. Tell me about some of the problems this character had to face.
Were these problems the kinds of problems that really happen to people your age?
5. Who or what influenced the decisions that the character(s) made in the story?
Who or what influences your decisions?
6. Do you ever make connections between yourself and the stories that you read? Explain your answer.

FOR EXTRA CREDIT

NOTE: Because so many of the students read more books than had been assigned, I decided that it was fair for them to receive extra credit on their reading grade for each extra book successfully completed. This was handled by adding points to their final reading average for the grading period. The number of points was determined by how well they completed the following sheet, which served as proof of their having actually read the book. (This was discussed with, and agreed upon by, the class. It was also noted that no points would be given for incomplete answers or any other indication that the book had not actually been read. The point scale varied from no points given to a maximum of two points per book. Books other than those on the lists could be used for extra credit provided they had been read during the course of the study, and provided the researcher had granted approval.)

Name: _____
 Title: _____
 Author: _____

Complete one of these sheets for each extra book that you read.

1. Write a brief, but complete, summary of the book.
2. Tell me about the main character(s) in this book.
3. Tell me a little about some of the problems with which this character had to deal.

Were these problems the kinds of problems that really happen to people your age?

4. Who influenced the decisions that the character(s) made in the story?
5. What would you have done in each of the decision-making situations that you mentioned in the first part of question 3?

APPENDIX L
Student and Teacher Consent Forms

**STUDENT CONSENT FORM
CONCERNING DATA GENERATED DURING STUDY**

Any comments which I have made, either written or verbal (audio and video-taped), may be included in this dissertation report. I understand that my real name will never be used in any way, and that my true identity will therefore be kept a secret.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

**TEACHER CONSENT FORM
CONCERNING DATA GENERATED DURING STUDY**

Any comments which I have made, either written or verbal (audio and video-taped), may be included in this dissertation report. I understand that my real name will never be used in any way, and that my true identity will therefore be kept a secret.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX M

Summary of Study as Final Member Check

Mailed to all students.
Response required from case studies.

COPY OF LETTER TO CASE STUDIES
(accompanied final member check and included instructions)

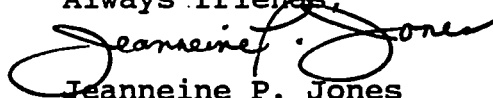
Dearest Alan, Misty, Larry, and Liberty:

I used your stories to illustrate my study. Your writings, conversations, and interviews were marvelous, honest, and well-written. I appreciate your wisdom and your sharing of these many details. I know that for some of you this honest sharing of intimate thoughts was a difficult decision; please know that I have taken great care to keep your identities a secret. (For example, I used your "wish names.")

I need to ask each of you to write a few sentences about the summary that you will find in this envelope. The following questions will give you some focus for your writing, but I'm asking that you respond in complete sentences rather than with just a few words. (I'll copy your answer into my report, so I want it to make sense without the questions.) I've enclosed an envelope for your convenience.

I love you more than you can possibly know, and I have come to respect you in a deep and lasting way. Sincere thanks and appreciation for opening your lives, and your hearts, to me...

Always friends,


 Jeanneine P. Jones

INSTRUCTIONS:

Read the enclosed summary and write a reaction to it. If you need help getting started, you may use (some or all of) the following questions as a guide.

1. Does Table 1 accurately list the social situations which your class of seventh grade students found common to their social world? (If no, how should the list be changed?)
2. Does this summary describe the study that took place in your classroom? (Especially note paragraph 1, page 3.)
3. Think about pages 3 and 4 as they relate to you personally. Do they correctly describe you? (more aware of the decisions that you make? consider consequences of your actions? find adolescent fiction to be one source that you might use when you're faced with a hard decision?, etc.)

4. Now that a few weeks have passed, how do you look back on this study? (made you more aware of your decision-making processes? interesting way to teach a reading class or not? you'd recommend this approach to other middle school teachers? Overall, valuable or not?)

5. Finally, have you done any reading this summer? If so, what? If not, why not?

FINAL MEMBER CHECK
(mailed to all students and their parents)

USING REALISTIC FICTION TO ENHANCE
SOCIAL DECISION MAKING IN
MIDDLE GRADES STUDENTS

a summary of the dissertation study
by
Jeanneine Petersen Jones

I have really enjoyed reading these books and discussing things about young adults and teenagers. I really feel about things different now. I thought that I was the only one that had problems but now I have noticed that I'm not.

--male, age 13

The books that we're reading have seemed so real. You can look back at the books and see that their decisions are very much like ours. If you ever have a problem or a decision to make, you can look back at the books if they are similar to yours.

--female, age 13

Some books have an effect on people. For example, if you are having trouble at home... Your parents are fussing at you every day. You decide you would run away. You could read a book of someone running away and quitting school. You will know what kind of future they got. You might see what would happen to you. That might of been a fiction book, but it could of been wrote just for you. They might change their minds and think more about what they were going to do.

--female, age 12

Books can help you decide better on the decisions that you make. People that decide in the books can help you decide better in life!

--male, age 13

Recent years have brought a great deal of attention to the young adolescent, as those interested in better serving this age group have searched for a deeper understanding of the changes that occur during this period of rapid growth and development. Educators accept this as both a turning point on the life span, and as a period of heightened decision making.

Statistics based on the social decisions made by adolescents are sobering, and they tend to underscore the fact that many young adults make choices which result in undesirable, and even harmful, behaviors. This study recognized the need for a relevant approach to decision making among teenagers, one which is applicable to middle grades curriculum and which can help adolescents make better choices.

This study investigated the use of realistic fiction as one such strategy. It described the ways in which a literature-based curriculum influenced the social decisions that a group of seventh grade reading students deemed common to their world. In order to do this, it first explored the decision-making agendas that were initially employed by these students. An opening questionnaire provided a listing of the decision-making situations in which these students found themselves regularly immersed. These situations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Common Social Decisions Faced by Students

Situation Involved:	% of Responses
General peer interactions (for example, with whom to be friends)	41%
Tobacco products	21%
Alcohol	11%
Cheating	9%
Shoplifting	7%
Drugs	7%

The study then introduced a host of literary peers who were immersed in a myriad of social decision-making situations which were similar to the students' world. The students examined the decisions that the characters made, and they eventually compared the characters' decisions to their own

personal agendas. The study closed with the students discussing their decision-making agendas, particularly in light of the influence that literature had on them during this study, and might continue to have in the future.

The closing questionnaire was analyzed in comparison to the introductory questionnaire. This researcher was particularly interested in the students' awareness of consequences. As is evidenced by Table 2, many of the students were initially concerned with a sense of immediate gratification, or some type of instant satisfaction. Eight weeks later, fully 90% of them had shifted into a recognition of consequences.

Table 2
Group Comparison of Consequences as Evidence of Growth

Category	% of responses:	
	Initially	In Closing
Made a choice involving immediate gratification	40%	10%
Made a choice involving short-range consequences	44%	75%
Made a choice involving long-range consequences	8%	10%
Made a choice involving a mixture of short and long-range consequences	8%	5%

A description of this closing decision-making agenda, and thus an enhanced awareness of consequences, is shared by a female class member:

In the book Second Star to the Right, Leslie is a very smart, outgoing person but has some problems with her self-esteem. She's always saying she is fat and ugly, but she is nice and likes having fun. I think I am a little bit like her. A couple of weeks ago, before you came, I was the same but I didn't eat anything. Sometimes I make bad decisions but this was the worst.

Leslie got that way because she kept on looking in the mirror and saying to herself, "If only I were skinny." And finally she went to a party and met this guy. He was short

and skinny. So she avoided him at first, but then after two months, she got the flu and lost five pounds and that was how it started.

I think she made bad decisions. But she might have made good decisions according to her. She didn't know what she was doing. I think she just let it happen.

I would probably have told my parents. First I would have thought about how I look right now. Second I would see if I'm happy. Third, I would see if I would hurt anyone. Fourth, I would make my decision. I'm different from her because I made the effort to see if I would hurt anyone and she didn't.

I actually make good and bad decisions. Sometimes I do things that I get in trouble for and sometimes I do stuff for other people and for other reasons.

There was a time at the last dance that a couple of people were smoking and they asked me if I wanted to smoke a cigarette. I said no because I had tried one before and didn't like it. I thought I made a pretty good decision. I was very comfortable with it, because if I had done it, it would have proved that I didn't think very much of myself and let them control my life. I'd tell other teenagers to think about the future and don't let your friends control your life. I've learned to take my time next time I make a decision.

In a closing journal entry, eighty-six percent of the students involved stated that realistic fiction was an appropriate basis for consultation and contemplation when difficult social decisions arise. (See quotations on opening page.) Additionally, growth was evidenced through an increased awareness of a systematic process for decision making, including a recognition of consequences.

The results of this study serve a two-fold audience: Middle grades teachers who are seeking approaches which will enhance their own classroom programs, and developing young adolescents who are in need of a personal decision-making strategy.