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Adolescents' attitudes toward talking about books: Implications for educators

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Abstract

Young people's frequency of engagement in reading books for pleasure markedly decreases as they move through the schooling years, reducing their exposure to this beneficial literacy practice. Young people's perceptions of the value of reading can be socially mediated, and positive perception of the value of reading is associated with frequency of engagement in reading. As such, considering how to generate positive social interactions around reading is an important concern when seeking to increase young people's reading frequency. We sought to investigate adolescents' attitudes toward talking about books in order to identify reasons for engagement in discussion about books, as well as factors that constrained engagement in such discussions, with a view to informing best practice for educators seeking to engage adolescents in reading. The findings suggest that adolescents' enjoyment of discussion about books may be related to common interests, enjoyment of discussion to facilitate critical exploration and comprehension, and the possibilities provided for recommendations and access. Adolescents' interests in and ability to engage in book discussions was shaped by mutual text exposure, opportunity, personal preference, disinterested peers and social status maintenance. Findings are considered in relation to classroom practice; the formation of Special Interest Reading Groups within the classroom is considered.

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Introduction

Recreational reading is widely acknowledged as a beneficial pastime. Reading frequency is associated with a range of literacy benefits (e.g. Clark & Douglas 2011; Mol & Bus 2011; OECD 2010), and, when compared with the reading of other text types, the reading of books remains most consistently associated with these literacy benefits (e.g. OECD 2010; Pfof, Dörfler & Artelt 2013; Zebrow & Kaufman 2016). Therefore, it is an ongoing educational and research imperative to investigate measures by which young people's engagement in book reading can be increased. When considering how best to achieve this, reading can be considered as a social practice (Allington & Swann 2009; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000; Street 1984), and as a literacy activity that is enacted in a contextually responsive manner, an activity that can be influenced by a range of influential social agents and structures. Social interactions in the learning environment are related to students' motivations and their reading outcomes (Guthrie, Wigfield & You 2012), and providing opportunities for discussion around books and reading could raise the social status of reading. Young people's perceptions of the social value of reading can influence their level of engagement in reading, as social influences can impact upon an individual's subjective task values for reading, potentially increasing "interest value, defined as how much the individual likes or is interested in the activity" and "attainment value, defined as the importance of the activity" (Wigfield 1997: 60-61).

Beginning or maintaining discussion about books and reading may be even more important in the secondary years of schooling than in primary school, as research suggests that young people's frequency of engagement in reading for pleasure steadily decreases as they move through the schooling years (OECD 2011; Scholastic 2015; Scholastic 2016a-b), and that parental and school support for the practice may also dwindle over time (e.g. Clark & Foster 2005; Morris & Kaplan 1994). Amongst other factors, research suggests that adolescents' attitudes toward recreational book reading may be influenced by the attitudes of their friends, educators, and families (Howard 2008; Merga 2014a-b; Merga 2015a; Zasacka 2014). "Adolescents who deemed books to be socially unacceptable were less likely to read books in their free time, and enjoy recreational book reading" (Merga 2014a: 479), and therefore raising the appeal of books reading is of importance, enabling it to compete successfully with other leisure choices outside the classroom.

Reading for pleasure involves free voluntary reading which can occur at home during recreation, or during time designated within the school day for students to enjoy reading self-selected materials (Krashen 2002). While a range of factors can inhibit students' willingness to engage in this practice, socially supportive activities, such as discussion around books, can provide opportunities for conversations around books and reading. This can increase the social

standing of the practice, and support adolescents to “identify themselves as readers” (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik 1999: 5). As such, the role of social influences and the social status of books and reading can be placed as central to educative interventions in this area. Some classrooms draw on this understanding to create opportunities for discussion around books by means such as book clubs (e.g. Broughton 2002; Eriksson 2002) or discussion of class texts. However, as these often involve discussion of teacher-prescribed reading materials, rather than student selected works, they may be restricted in their ability to foster a love of books and reading, as the importance of allowing adolescents choice in their reading materials is well recognised (e.g. Krashen 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik 1999).

Most of the research around book discussion is focussed on structured book discussion within the classroom context (e.g. Petrich 2015), and primarily explored in the context of book clubs. Research with younger children suggests that book clubs are generally well-received, and a greater amount of time spent discussing books would be welcomed (McKool 2007). Lapp and Fisher (2009) found that adolescent students responded positively to opportunities to engage in book club discussions in high school, appreciating opportunities to interact and share ideas about books, with positive effects for comprehension also noted. Petrich’s (2015) research with 5th grade students also found learning benefits, with students experiencing improved discussion skills and showing a willingness to extend themselves by reading more challenging books with peer support. They also experienced social benefits which relate to those described by Wilhelm and Smith (2015): “the pleasure derived from using reading to understand and affiliate with others and the pleasure of using reading to make a place for ourselves in our social worlds” (p. 9). Whittingham and Huffman (2009) also found that experiences of book discussion in book clubs had a positive effect on their attitude toward reading in children who were initially reluctant readers.

While exploring discussion about books in relation to specific pedagogical practice such as book clubs offers insights into students’ experience of discussions around books, relatively few studies have sought to discover adolescents’ attitudes toward book discussion in general. Exploring students’ attitudes toward talking about books in general enables us to identify the range of social influences that can be successful agents in this regard, in the classroom and beyond. In addition, it illuminates adolescents’ attitudes toward this practice and the range of factors that help make book discussion enjoyable or otherwise. This article reports on research findings from the 2016 study *Teen Reading in the Digital Era*, which collected mixed-methods data from adolescent students in two Australian states, seeking to explore which factors shape young people’s attitudes toward discussing books, with a view to informing the development of more responsive models of engagement for both school-based (teacher and librarian) and home-based (parent-guardian) educators of adolescents.

Method

Context and Participants

The study was granted both institutional and state education departmental ethics approvals for Victorian and Western Australian schools, and piloted at a metropolitan school in Victoria before implementation, with minor changes made to the research tools.

Participants in the 2016 study *Teen Reading in the Digital Era* were recruited from 13 secondary schools in Victoria (7) and Western Australia (6). School recruitment then commenced in Terms 2 and 3 of 2016. Schools were sampled to ensure representative diversity, and included metropolitan and rural schools, government/non-government schools, and a range of socio-economic and geographic contexts. Schools ranged from 942 to 1043 on the Australian schools' Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (ACARA 2016). The mean for participating schools was 997.46, just below the overall Australian average of 1000. Student diversity was also highly variable across the schools recruited, with school composition of Indigenous students ranging from 0-5%, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds ranging from 0-73% of the school populations. Saturation was achieved within this sample, so additional interviews were not required.

Data focusing on the research field reported on in this article was collected in 37 semi-structured interviews of participants from the 13 schools. Semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewers to further interrogate new ideas that arose, and enabled participants to reflect on habits and conversations that would otherwise have been difficult to capture (Merriam 2009). Interviews were conducted between 21st July and 12th September 2016, with three children randomly selected from each school to participate where possible, controlled only for gender (we tried to select a relatively equal amount of female and male participants). Participants were from the lower secondary Years 7-10, and all respondents had site manager, parent/guardian and individual consent to participate in the study. Further details about the sample composition can be seen in Table 1 below.

This article reports on interview data relevant to the research questions:

- 1) What are adolescents' attitudes toward discussing books?
- 2) What factors and influences shape these attitudes?

As such, all data were collected on the semi-structured interview schedule in response to interview question nine: Do you like talking about the books you read? Why/why not?

Table 1: *Interview participant characteristics*

Pseudonym	State	School Year	Age
Female			
Stacy	WA	7	12
Nancy	WA	7	12
Bhakti	WA	7	12
Rachel	VIC	7	12
Anna	VIC	7	13
Lucy	WA	9	14
Catherine	WA	9	14
Paige	WA	9	14
Melanie	VIC	9	14
Jessica	VIC	9	14
Lara	VIC	9	15
Chloe	WA	10	15
Sally	WA	10	15
Laura	VIC	10	15
Tilda	VIC	10	15
Hayley	WA	10	16
Anushka	VIC	10	16
Male			
Inesh	VIC	7	11
Ben	WA	7	12
Suresh	WA	7	12
Lachlan	WA	7	12
Aaron	VIC	7	12
Simon	VIC	7	12
Josh	VIC	7	13
Logan	WA	8	13
Jet	VIC	8	13
Adam	WA	9	14
Brody	WA	9	14
Chris	WA	9	15
Luke	VIC	9	15
Tim	VIC	9	15
Brian	WA	10	15
Brock	WA	10	15
Jake	VIC	10	15
Will	VIC	10	16
Spencer	VIC	10	16
Jonah	VIC	10	16

Occasional related prompts supported this question, although interviewers were careful to avoid inadvertent shaping of responses through additional questions. In rare instances, where an issue was tangentially raised in response to unrelated questions, the data has been included for analysis.

Analysis of Interview Data

Analysis of interview data began in situ with the interviewers, Margaret, Michelle and Leonie. All authors were closely involved in the interview

process. As such, while the interviews were being undertaken, we began to make connections between respondents' ideas and opinions, and ways of shaping their views, identifying trends and common positions that we informally recorded in our field notes, although we avoided discussing these in our email and Skype meetings during the data collection period to ensure that, when we approached coding, our codes would be sufficiently independent and therefore more reliable. Interviews were then transcribed and checked for accuracy, after which the transcripts were closely examined and all data relating to the research questions highlighted and isolated for coding purposes.

Margaret and Michelle then coded all of the interview transcripts independently, autonomously developing a codebook or frame, which was constantly revised and refined through iterative reading, then "judging for each predetermined segment of text whether a specific code is present" (Hruschka 2004, p. 308). Once this had been performed, we shared our analysis through emails and Skype discussions, negotiating a common coding frame. We then revisited the data and finalised the themes to be included, which dictated the results shaped by the data explored herein. The process followed reflects that prescribed by Dey (1993) of "describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how our concepts interconnect" (p. 31). All data are presented in lightly edited verbatim, with removal of insignificant repetitions and dysfluencies that did not influence meaning.

Results

With a few notable exceptions, respondents were generally positively disposed toward discussing books. although in most cases where a student claimed not to like discussing books, they subsequently explained that this was because they had never done so in the past. As such, their reticence to discuss books was more strongly associated with a lack of prior opportunity than with a preference, though there were some exceptions to this, as will be explored further herein. Respondents identified reasons why they enjoyed discussing books, but they also highlighted dependent factors that could increase or inhibit their enjoyment of book discussions. Both subsets of the results offer important considerations for educators wishing to implement or increase student exposure to book discussion at school, in libraries, at home, or any other literacy-supportive context.

Reasons for engaging in book discussion

Just as readers can be motivated to read for a diverse array of reasons, including but not limited to knowledge acquisition, perspective-taking, creative inspiration, or entertainment (Merga 2017), reasons for engaging in book discussion are not uniform, and are reflective of individual preferences and motivations. Recurring themes around reasons for engaging in book discussion related to common interests, enjoyment of discussion, recommendations, and access to reading materials. While these themes were interrelated

in some cases, they have been teased apart for the purposes of further exploration.

Common interests

Sharing books often involved concurrent reading with a peer with like interests, cementing friendships and familial relationships in the process. For instance, Jet used common interest as a point of social engagement with his father around books, as he likes to discuss “the sport ones, and he’s into his sport as well. The whole family is but, yeah, I talk about that to Dad”. Stacy described sharing the Warrior Cats series with her friend, where “she and I started like a little book club and we both read at the same time, and talked about it. She’s actually a fast reader, so she’s far ahead in the series than I am.” Stacy’s friend was careful to avoid exposing her to spoilers, having read ahead.

Some peer-shared discussions around books of common interest were partially motivated by competition. Brock explained how this competition created urgency in his recreational reading of the Harry Potter series, inspired by his interactions with a friend:

Brock: *I remember when we were reading it, it was The Goblet of Fire, I had about 20 pages left, and I hadn’t actually finished it yet, she’d finished it and she asked me if I had finished it, and I’m like, “Oh yeah, I’m going to get the new book, the next book tomorrow,” because she already has the books, and she didn’t like reading them because there was something wrong with them, I think the spine was out of place or something.*

Interviewer: *Oh, okay.*

Brock: *So I’m like, “Oh, I’m going to get it before you.” So I came to school extra early, I borrowed it, I finished off mine, and then I started reading it, and she’s like, “You haven’t even finished the other one yet.” I’m like, “I have now.”*

Brock humorously shared a sense of smug satisfaction at his ability to out-read his friend, which he clearly found motivating. It is likely that this friendly competition increased Brock’s reading frequency and volume while in effect. This peer driven interaction around reading seemingly avoids the competitive sidelining of “slow” readers in some classroom booktalk activities, as avid readers discursively perform their superiority over slower classmates for the benefit of teachers (Eriksson Barajas & Aronson 2009).

Enjoyment of discussion

It became apparent that, for some students, the opportunity to discuss books, and to use them as a source of debate, was crucial. These critical readers were not always concerned with mutual interests or reaching consensus; they

sometimes used discussion as a form of light provocation. For example, Lucy enjoyed discussing books, and was happy to share her experiences with books with her mother, gaining enjoyment from her mother's reaction:

I was reading the book Rose Madder by Stephen King, I like told my mum about it, and she was like mildly disgusted by it, and was like, "Why are you even reading that?" But it was just fun to tell her about it.

When discussing her views on books and reading, Lucy had previously explained that she enjoyed reading challenging texts that could expand her knowledge and perspective, particularly those that explored cultural taboos. Lucy read to expand her knowledge and understanding, not just for enjoyment, and her approach to discussing books may to some extent have been reflective of her motivation for reading. She was not necessarily interested in exploring mutual enjoyment; rather in finding pleasure in challenging her mother's perspective.

Chris enjoyed the social element of debate around books, explaining that he "loves" talking about books, as "it's just really good to compare with other people how you feel about the book, and certain characters. And, yeah, I really enjoy talking about it and giving my opinion on it and things in the book". Chris explained that there was not always consensus on books and characters:

Chris: *Sometimes there can be small arguments about characters and that, but normally we can work out who's good and who's bad [chuckles].*

Interviewer: [Chuckles] *Okay. And that sounds interesting. When you say that sometimes there are small arguments, can you give me an example of a controversial character?*

Chris: *We're talking about favourite characters, and I prefer the evil character as I find them quite interesting. Like we were just, yeah, talking about the interesting characters, and you know the stereotypical good person is always going to win and that, I can sometimes find it quite boring, so I quite enjoyed the evil character, so that's what we were arguing about [chuckles].*

Chris's favourite "evil character" was Cersei in Game of Thrones; he explained that he liked her "because she's very strong, opinionated, but she's able to like slowly and like behind the scenes get what she wants, and yeah, I quite like that about her." Chris was well-equipped to generate arguments about books and engage in critical and complex character exploration with his friends, where, as in more formal book clubs, they could negotiate meaning through

joint enterprise, in a context that “values debate and contestation” (Peplow 2011: 311).

Chris’s attitude toward discussion of books as an emotional experience reflects findings by Whiteley (2011), which investigate “the emotional significance of the interaction between reader and text” (37-38) which can lead to an enhanced reading experience. It is worth noting that both Lucy and Chris’s enjoyment of discussion about books may be related to enjoyment of discussion in general, with both respondents demonstrating clearly well-established analytical skills in the interview. This is supportive of a conceptualisation of reading “in which response is seen as a critical and communal practice” (Park 2012: 193). As such, both the emotional experience of reading and the emotional possibilities and rewards of discussing reading emerge as noteworthy.

While some students such as Chris sought opportunities to engage in higher order thinking, book discussion was also identified as an opportunity for less confident readers to consolidate comprehension and access peer support to enable this. Spencer explained:

Yeah, sometimes I do like to talk about the books that I’m reading. Sometimes I like to talk about the plot of what’s going on in it, but I do like to talk about the plot and what’s going on in a certain section in the book as well. So that kind of helps me to understand it, ‘cause if I can talk about it to somebody else then that helps me understand it a bit better, and that way I know what I’m reading.

Thus enjoyment of discussion was also related to its capacity for providing clarity around comprehension, highlighting the potential value of book discussion for students at diverse reading comprehension levels.

Recommendations

Recommendations gained in book discussions provided exposure to a broader range of books and genres, supporting future book choices. This is significant as many adolescents may lack effective strategies for choosing books, thus reducing their reading frequency (Merga 2016). Discussion about books with friends led Anna to discover new authors:

... my friends will say, “Well maybe you should try this”, and I’ve got friends with similar taste in books, and they’ve said “Well what if you get this book, because I got off this book onto this book”. So I’ve tried that and that’s how I got onto Andy Griffiths.

Anna’s friends are able to guide her from one reading material source immediately to another one, based on their knowledge of her interests. This mitigates the likelihood of a gap between books, potentially increasing reading volume

and frequency. That the reading material is suggested by friends with knowledge of Anna's personal preferences is also likely to increase the likelihood that Anna will find the suggested materials enjoyable. As the friends possess "similar taste in books" they are a reliable source of recommendations.

Anushka's teacher was also a valued source of recommendations, though she also sought guidance online if her access to her teacher or friends was limited:

Well, I'll either talk to friends who love to read novels, who will actually read novels more occasionally than I do, or my English teacher. She loves to read novels as well, and sometimes if I can't find anyone who gives me any ideas, I'll search up sort of things that I'm interested in on the internet and then it just gives me a few ideas. I have a list actually of books that I want to read.

Anushka shared a common reader identity with her teacher and friends, who also loved to read, and was therefore able to draw upon them as a rich resource, though she was not solely dependent on them for recommendations.

Access

Friends and family also provided material access to books. Tilda described sharing books with her friends, explaining that "we often exchange books" and that "she's got one of my books, *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart at the moment. And I've read a few of hers and we just swap back and forth and back and forth." Physically sharing books by providing access to them is arguably the next progression from providing recommendations, as the person receiving the recommendation does not need to independently source the book.

Access was also related to a more complex familial exchange in the case of Nancy, a somewhat reluctant reader who was much more engaged in sporting pursuits, primarily football and netball. Nancy liked talking about books with her mother. Her mother was her principal source of access to books, and talking to her mother was useful, "so then she knows what books to get me," as "she knows what kind of books I like reading, like the *My Story*, and like comedy ones." This is advantageous for Nancy, who also explained "I don't know how to pick my books," indicating difficulty sourcing interesting reading material. In turn, Nancy felt that her mother used these discussion opportunities for surveillance, as "she asks me what's happening in the book, to make sure I'm actually reading it", which is deemed necessary as "sometimes I go on my phone instead". Nancy depended on her mother for access, and it was her mother's insistence that she read that led to her maintaining a reading habit, albeit a reluctant one. However, as Nancy's mother chooses all her reading materials rather than scaffolding the process for Nancy, Nancy did not need to master techniques for choosing

books in her preferred genres, historical fiction and humour, which could potentially prevent her from developing these choosing skills.

Determinants of adolescents' willingness to engage in book discussions

In addition to the aforementioned reasons for engaging in book discussion, older children's willingness to engage in book discussion could be conditional or shaped by issues that were perceived to be immutable. A number of recurring key factors were identified by participants. These determinants could limit both possibility and motivation to engage in book discussions.

Previous exposure

In order to discuss specific books, mutual knowledge of them was desirable. Sally preferred not to discuss a book with those who were not familiar with it, to avoid spoiling key plot points and thus inhibiting that person's future potential enjoyment of the book. Lara shared this view, explaining: "I don't really like it when they haven't read them and then you're trying to explain and you say something to them and they're like 'Oh what's that?'. Respondents' lack of exposure through infrequent reading can also be an issue. Jake felt that it would be difficult to contribute to discussion around books "cause I guess I don't read that much". As such, exposure to the text in discussion by all participants is desirable.

Opportunity

Without opportunity, students did not develop enjoyment of book discussion, and generally presented themselves as negative or neutral based on this inexperience. For example, when asked if they enjoy discussing books, Suresh stated that "I've never really talked about the books that I read", and Lachlan said that he was "not entirely sure since I've never really done that before". Simon kept an open mind despite his inexperience, explaining: "I have never actually done it, but I wouldn't mind it." In order to determine enjoyment of book discussion, students needed to have had an opportunity to engage in it. As such, it is important to view a negative or neutral response about book discussion in relation to opportunity; if students take a negative position with no previous experience to justify it, this is not an informed position, and perhaps more likely to be malleable.

Personal preference

Some students simply did not identify as the type of person who enjoyed discussion around books. Bhakti explained: "if I read a book I just read it. I don't like really discuss about how the book goes, and what's going on in the book. Some people discuss like every chapter. I don't really; I just keep it to myself." Rachel similarly felt that "I'm not really constantly the type to talk about the things I'm reading," bringing to bear notions of identity, of being a "type" who enjoys a certain practice. This can be related to previous work in this area, which recognises "experiences with reading may be related to the readers' sense of themselves" (Broughton, 2002: 34). Both Bhakti's and Rachel's views

could be characterized as reflective of Howard's (2008) Voluntary Solitary readers, who "simply do not see any reason to share or discuss their reading with their peers" (p. 115).

Interested peers

Peer disinterest was perceived as quite discouraging in some instances. For example, Jonah described being an outlier within his friendship group:

Yeah, I like talking about the books that I read. I don't really have that many other people that I can talk to about it though. I'm usually just the one left all alone knowing about this stuff and trying to talk to others about it, and they're like, "Oh, that sounds like great". And you're like, "Yeah, you should give it a read," and they're like, "Maybe".

Jonah felt relatively isolated; while his recommendations were considerably rebuffed, they were not followed up.

However, it is important to note that disinterested peers were not always a barrier. Catherine enjoyed discussing books, though her "friends find it irritating", and Jessica would talk to her older sister about books on the walk to school, even though her sister did not enjoy reading. However, it could be surmised that the quality of these discussions, between a keen reader and a disinterested listener, may not necessarily have been as robust as those between individuals with mutual interests; further research is needed in this area.

Social status maintenance

Closely associated with the theme of disinterested peers was the concern for maintenance of social status. Hayley was a keen reader who described discussing books online to avoid raising peer awareness of her high book reading volume and frequency. While she explained that reading was socially acceptable at other schools, she did not feel that it was socially acceptable in her school, and within her particular peer group.

Hayley: *I don't want to say this, because it's going to make me sound like a bum hole – but there's like groups right, you know like the populars, the want-to-be's, the try-hards, the nerds, and you know the cliché ones.*

Interviewer: *Uh-huh.*

Hayley: *But like there's group of girls, and like they're just really smart girls, they're all beautiful girls, but like they like to read books, and we made this chat [chuckles], a Wattpad chat on Facebook,*

and we shared books there. Like it's not like a chat to talk on, we just share books that we like every now and again.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay. Cool. And are you actually in that social group, or in a different social group?*

Hayley: *I'm in a different social group.*

Interviewer: *OK. Go on, tell me which one.*

Hayley: *The popular ones.*

Hayley was able to discuss reading with friends from a lower social stratum through the less-visible mechanism of online social networking, though she further explained that discussing books with her 'popular' school friends was not really possible, as "you can't really talk to like some people about books and stuff because they'd be like, 'Oh my God, what is she talking about? There's a party this Friday, but she wants to read?'" As such, Hayley's discussion of books was carefully negotiated within the context of social status preservation.

Implications for Educators

The implications for educators highlighted herein are primarily aimed at classroom teachers, though they may also offer insights for librarians and parents wishing to support reading discussion in their learning contexts of library and home.

Amongst those who engaged in discussing books, the enjoyment of common interests and negotiated meaning (Peplow 2011) was highlighted. Educators can use this information to prioritise giving students opportunities to form Special Interest Reading Groups within the English classroom, whereby students with similar generic preferences can generate their own book clubs. In these, the reading of self-selected and mutually agreed upon texts read may mitigate the barrier of lack of previous exposure. This can also enable those experiencing the limitation of disinterested peers to discuss their preferred reading materials in an environment of shared interest. Affording time for such discussions in class within the crowded curriculum also powerfully communicates the continued importance of reading and book discussion beyond the early years. By promoting a book-supportive culture that privileges student interests and preferences, the social status of books within the classroom might be potentially enhanced.

Our analysis of the students who enjoyed active discussion about books revealed the diverse levels of ability and reasons for desired engagement in book discussion, drawing attention to the literacy skills required to participate in active discussion around books. To contribute, students need to have been able to comprehend the book in order to engage with the plot and characters, posing limitations for those adolescents still struggling with independent

reading skill, and highlighting the importance of supported engagement for these individuals appropriate to the cause of their reading difficulty. Even students who can read fluently and independently, and thus to some extent avoid detection of their literacy struggles, need to be able to comprehend the text - although, as previously explored, book discussion can potentially enhance student comprehension. It is likely that those students using book discussion of a shared text as an opportunity to build comprehension may verbally contribute far less than students with strong comprehension, whose preference is to debate issues around character construction - but both parties may find comparably valuable learning opportunities through participation in such discussion. In addition, researchers such as Harmon and Wood (2001) outline more structured book discussion models, such as the TAB (Talking About Books) approach, which scaffolds struggling students, giving them confidence to actively engage.

Critical group discussion has been associated with more significant higher-level learning than more traditional teacher-centred approaches (e.g. Garside, 1996). However, we wish to highlight here that critical discussion – the skill aptly demonstrated by a number of respondents including Chris – is a learned rather than innate skill, which may not already be in the repertoire of all adolescent students, and must therefore be explicitly scaffolded and modelled, to support student participation. The lack of prior opportunity to engage in book discussions experienced by some students suggests that it is important not to assume that students will have competence or confidence in this area. Vriend Van Dunen, Hamilton & Rumohr-Voskuil (2017) identify one effective mechanism for developing skills in this area, reliant on intergenerational support for developing these skills through parent/child book clubs. These skills can also be developed across a range of additional classroom practices, such as persuasive public speaking and debating.

Students' appreciation of recommendations and access were important considerations, as both are likely to increase reading frequency by mitigating the requirement of choice and alleviating resourcing constraints. Friend recommendations have been consistently identified as valuable to adolescents (e.g. Maynard et al. 2008; McKool 2007; Rinehart, Gerlach, Wisell & Welker 1998). While this is clearly extremely valuable for promoting reading, book discussion opportunities should be given alongside opportunities to learn about how to choose books, as sole dependence on external recommendations could lead to reading infrequency when the recommender is unavailable, and research suggests that choosing skills is an issue for both young and older readers (e.g. Merga 2016; Merga 2017).

It is also important to note that, for students to be able to discuss books, they need to be able to obtain books, ideally within the classroom. Access to books is associated with higher literacy as well as frequency of engagement in reading (Krashen et al. 2012; Merga 2015b). It is important that this access be

reflective of students' diverse preferences, as, to foster discussion, students need a choice of reading material so they can align this with their interests. For example, Heron-Hruby, Trent and Stiles (2016) describe the formation of a classroom library by taking requests from students, with multiple copies of each book bought allowing for simultaneous reading and discussion.

This study investigates book discussion in general. While it holds implications for classroom practice, it also provides insight into how even less formal educative exchanges can be fostered around books outside the classroom context, such as in the home. Indeed, some adolescents preferred to talk to siblings or parents, rather than peers. It was interesting to note that a lack of mutual interest in the text did not necessarily preclude discussion in supportive dyads; adolescents may use their book discussions to provoke, to explore, to comprehend, amongst a range of reasons for engagement, and if educators and parents show willingness to be responsive to these diverse needs, book discussion can foster increased engagement in recreational reading. We hope to explore further research directions in this compelling area, including work exploring the effects of implementing some of the suggestions that have arisen from this study.

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