INVESTIGATING
THE PICTURE BOOK PREFERENCES
OF GRADE FOUR
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to investigate the picture book preferences of grade four Aboriginal students, to discover what books have the greatest appeal and to determine which specific factors influence their choices. The study took place at an inner city elementary school with a high population of Aboriginal students located in the heart of the Canadian prairies.

Experienced educators know that the majority of Aboriginal children come to school with little or no exposure to books. Studies have shown that the ability or lack of ability to read at grade level is a strong indicator of future academic success. Teachers and librarians have little information available to assist them in choosing literature that will be of interest to Aboriginal students and motivate them to read and through practice improve their reading skills. Provincial governments are looking for research that addresses the needs of this growing population.

Twelve grade four Aboriginal students participated in the study, seven boys and five girls. The students viewed forty-five books that were divided into three sets of fifteen and chose one book from each set to read and respond to through writing and/or drawing. After the book selection and response sessions were complete, the researcher interviewed each child to determine the one book they would most want to take home.
The study concludes that: 1) Students preferred to read picture books portraying Aboriginal characters that reflected their own image; 2) Students transposed the urban and rural settings in the Aboriginal books to make relevant connections with their lives; 3) Aboriginal books portraying Aboriginal characters was the genre with the greatest appeal; 4) Students preferred vivid realistic illustrations; 5) Students background experience frequently determined their preferences in books and also increased their motivation to read; 5) Realistic pictures with minimal amounts of text held great appeal for boys selecting information books.

It is hoped that the study will assist teachers and librarians in selecting literature that will be of interest to Aboriginal students encouraging them to read more and by improving their reading skills raise the level of their general academic achievement.
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Dedication

To the children at Sacred Heart Community School,
thank you for all you have taught me.

To Mom and Dad, thank you for helping me
make “this dream of mine” come true.
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Chapter I  
The Research Problem  

Introduction

“No kind of writing lodges itself so deeply in our memory, echoing there for the rest of our lives, as the books that we met in our childhood....To enter and hold the mind of a child or a young person is one of the hardest of all writers’ tasks” (Zinsser, 1990, p.3). One would be hard pressed today to find a Canadian primary classroom that did not have a selection of children’s literature displayed prominently. Children’s literature is often the basis for a substantial part of each academic day and becomes a powerful influence on children’s language and literacy development. Books provide delight and enjoyment while at the same time enhancing the readers’ awareness of the diverse universe they live in. Literature develops children’s imagination as they explore the natural world from many different perspectives. Literature provides insight and meaning by allowing children to live vicariously through the characters they find in books. Children have the opportunity to experience many different situations, to learn about people from many different backgrounds and sometimes to meet individuals in stories who are struggling with the same problems.
“As Aboriginal people approach the 21st century, the need is great for a transformed education that enriches our character and dignity, that emerges from one's own roots and cultural experience, from which a voice once powerless can be raised, and where diversity is seen as an asset, not a source for prejudice” (Battiste, 1996, p. 22). The reality is that in Canada, the majority of Aboriginal students come to school with little or no exposure to books (Ward, Shook, & Marrion, 1993). This paucity of literary experience before they enter school places them at a great disadvantage academically. The value of reading to young children is a belief which dates from the turn of the century when educators suggested that reading to youngsters was beneficial in developing their literacy skills (Morrow, 1990). It is evident that language development correlates with reading success and that both can be improved by regular exposure to children's literature (Cohen, 1968).

Teachers need to acknowledge the differences found in Aboriginal students and should implement strategies that will motivate them to read so they can improve their reading skills and reach grade level expectations. A common problem found by educators is that curriculum generally reflects the ideals of the majority of the population and does not cater to the needs of these special students (Battiste, 1996; Cummins, 1992; Kirkness, 1996; Reed, 1999). There is little or no information available detailing the type of literature that would appeal to these children. Research is needed to discover literature that will assist
teachers and librarians in motivating Aboriginal students. “Many teachers and librarians feel that cultural and ethnic factors are related to reading interests. One of the arguments for providing culturally authentic picture books... for Native American children is that readers from a particular culture will find material drawn from their own culture more interesting. The relationship between interests and culture does not seem to be simple, and unfortunately there is not much research to clarify this point” (Huck et al., 2001, p.35-36).

Adults often believe they know what literature is best for children, but when books are actually placed before the youthful readers, the adults may be proven wrong. Discovering which types of books as well as which specific factors appeal to Aboriginal children will provide a start to developing a curriculum that acknowledges the cultural diversities and backgrounds of these students. The population of Aboriginal students is growing and classroom instruction needs to accommodate this population by finding what it is these students want to read.
Background

The researcher's teaching experience has taken place in a primary classroom of an inner city elementary school located in Saskatchewan. The school has a high percentage of Aboriginal students. These students were significantly behind in their reading skills, having had little motivation to pick up a book and read. They simply were not comfortable with books and spending time with books was not a natural activity for them.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the picture book preferences of grade four Aboriginal students, to discover what genre has the greatest appeal and to determine which specific factors influence the students' selection of books. The study examines data describing students' book choices, and it is hoped the results will assist teachers and librarians to more successfully select books that are of interest and relevant to Aboriginal students.

Although studies have investigated students' attitudes toward reading and their preferred themes in literature, few have looked at what Aboriginal students would like to read. "Like attitudes, interests are concerned with preferences. Both are related to favorable or unfavorable responses towards something. Preferences are important in education"
since they influence motivation and goals, which in turn affect achievement.” (McMillan, 2000, p. 156).

The population of Aboriginal students is increasing. “Although Saskatchewan’s population as a whole is ageing, the Aboriginal population shows an opposite trend. For example, according to the Census, 51% of Saskatchewan’s Aboriginal population was nineteen years old or younger in 1996, while only 29% of the non-Aboriginal population was nineteen years old or younger” (Saskatchewan Education Indicators, 2000, p. 8). Consequently, teachers and librarians need to meet the needs of this population. The use of books that appeal to these grade four students will enhance their motivation to read and will be one of the first steps in advancing their academic achievement.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are the following:

1. What are the picture book preferences of grade four Aboriginal students?

2. Which genre (Aboriginal, fantasy, information, realism) has the greatest appeal for Aboriginal students?

3. Which specific factors determine the picture book preferences of Aboriginal grade four students?
Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are relevant to the study:

**Aboriginal:** The Regina Catholic School Board defines Aboriginal as Indigenous people, such as First Nations, Metis, Inuit and non-status Indians. “Some are First Nations students, some with and some without status under the Indian Act, who live on and off reserves in rural and urban areas...and Metis students. The term Aboriginal is inclusive of all these students” (BC Education, 1999, p. 2).

**Aboriginal Content:** These are books containing one or more Aboriginal symbols, characters, motifs or traditional stories.

**Children's Literature:** “Literature is the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language. Where appropriate, we consider fiction as well as non-fiction, pictures as well as words, asking how different genres or sets of symbols work to produce an aesthetic experience” (Huck et al., 2001, p.3).

**Fantasy Content:** These are books about an imaginative world or books where children, animals or other creatures are engaged in imaginative play. “Fantasy helps the child develop the imagination. To be able to imagine, conceive of alternative ways of life, to entertain new ideas, to
create strange new worlds, to dream dreams-these are all skills vital to human survival” (Huck et al., 2001, p. 302).

**Information Content:** These are non-fiction books which provide facts about a specialized topic through the integration of text, illustration or photographs.

**Kookum:** A word for grandmother in Cree, the participants’ Aboriginal language.

**Picture Books:** “These are books in which images and ideas join to form a unique whole. In the best picture books, the illustrations extend and enhance the written text, providing the reader with an aesthetic experience that is more than the sum of the book’s parts” (Huck et al., 2001, p. 168).

**Reading Preference:** “The readiness to receive one object as against another. The predisposition of a subject to prefer one reading theme over another” (Summers & Lukasevich, 1983).

**Realism Content:** These are books that deal with ordinary life. They contain, “...writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today. Everything in the story could conceivably
happen to real people living in our natural physical world" (Huck et al., 2001, p. 402).

**Summary**

The study investigates grade four Aboriginal students' picture book preferences. Knowledge of Aboriginal students' picture book preferences has the potential to serve as a guideline for the selection of reading material by teachers and librarians to accommodate this growing population.

The thesis is divided into five parts. The research problem is described in Chapter I. Related literature is reviewed in Chapter II. Methodology and procedures are outlined in Chapter III. The findings and discussion are presented in Chapter IV. Conclusions, implications and recommendations for further research are put forward in Chapter V.
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Research With Aboriginal Students

A review of the research literature and consultation with Jo-Anne Archibald, Head of the University of British Columbia's First Nations Long House Department as well as reference librarians at the University of Regina's Saskatchewan Indian Federated College revealed that there has been no formal research investigating the reading preferences of Aboriginal children. It has also become evident that there is little research looking at Aboriginal children and their success in literacy education. This lack of research suggests that there is a need to investigate and document studies involving education and literacy in regard to Aboriginal students (BC Education, 1999). "The literacy development of low-income and minority children living in urban centers is currently a matter of considerable concern because of continuing evidence that these children lag far behind more economically and socially advantaged children" (Snow, 1991, p.5). "Most, but not all, available research supports the hypothesis that children from less-advantaged backgrounds are read to less regularly by their parents" (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994, p. 254). It has been proven that children who are good readers "arrive at school with broad cultural
understandings about literacy, its value and uses" (Teale, 1981, 1984; Snow et al., 1995).

The most applicable research to date involves unspecified minority groups and their preferences in reading children’s literature. It has also been shown that the cultural influence in a child’s selection of picture books has only been briefly studied and there is need for research in this area (Wolfson et al., 1984; Lehr, 1994; Huck, 1997, 2001).

“Many teachers and librarians feel that cultural and ethnic factors are related to reading interest. One of the arguments for providing culturally authentic picture books about...Native American children is that readers from a particular culture will find material drawn from their own cultural more interesting” (Huck, 2001, p. 35). Huck discusses one study of American Indian and Anglo children in grades two and three that found Native American children preferred to read about Indian characters, although they preferred stories that had characters from both races over those that had only members of one race (1997, p.42). “The relationship between interests and culture does not seem to be simple, and unfortunately there is not much research to clarify this point” (Huck, 2001, p. 36). Rick Johnson at Saskatchewan Education, noted that the Saskatchewan Government does not measure literacy rates of Aboriginal students and therefore could “not provide the background data relevant to this study.”
Reading Preferences

Research investigating literature preferences of children has been going on for over 30 years. Numerous studies have been undertaken trying to identify what types of books children prefer to read, but selecting these books is still not an easy task. Huck and Kuhn’s (1968) early work states two reasons for investigating literature preferences of children that are still relevant today. First, high interest materials enable children to become absorbed in a book and they will engage in reading for longer periods of time. Second, knowing the literature preferences of children will enable the teacher to expand the interest of the children and anticipate new areas of interest. Huck continues to support research in this area and says that children’s interest and preferences are still a major concern for teachers, librarians, parents, publishers, and booksellers. Adults who select books for children can be more successful by knowing which books are likely to have immediate appeal and which ones might require introduction or encouragement along the way (Huck, 1997).
Emergent Literacy Defined

Before discussing past research that has looked at children's literature preferences and the affects these preferences have on literacy, it is important to have a clear idea of what literacy entails. Many researchers have contributed to a wide range of complex definitions. Soare (1992) states, "consensual agreement on a single definition [of literacy] is quite implausible" (p. 140). Several researchers define literacy as a continuum of skills that are acquired both in and outside of formal schooling and that relate directly to the ability of individuals to function within society (Venessky, Kaestke, & Sum, 1987). Others such as Freire (1985), define literacy as "a process of search and creation by which illiterate learners are challenged to perceive the deeper meaning of language and the word that in essence, they are being denied" (p. 10) or as the ability to read, write, and figure in a functionally useful way (Froese 1996). In conjunction with Froese, another researcher defines literacy as the "ability to read and write for specific purposes achieved through an integrated approach to all aspects of language: listening, speaking, writing, and reading" (Zarry, 1991 p.93).

It is evident that emergent literacy includes speaking, listening, reading and writing, all of which are interrelated (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992) and that "learning to read and write are interrelated processes that develop in concert with oral language" (Strickland, 1990 p. 21). Literacy then becomes one of the most important tools that people need to survive
in today's society (Goodman, 1986). "If we are going to achieve greater literacy for all, then we must have the understanding necessary to observe literacy development in the very young child" (Goodman, 1986, p. 13). Children who have had prior experience with literature are more likely to be academically advanced compared to children with less exposure (Huck, 1997). This concept of literacy often is not supported in the Aboriginal culture, which has a tradition of oral rather than written communication (Battiste, Kirkness, & Sheridan).

Aboriginal Oral Literacy

A strong component of the Aboriginal culture is oral storytelling as it traditionally has been used to educate and pass on knowledge through the generations (BC Shared Learnings, 1998). Oral storytelling is valued as a skill and regarded as a form of literacy in Aboriginal culture, but because it is not held in the same high regard by school systems, Aboriginal children experience problems developing those literacy skills deemed appropriate in mainstream schools (Sheridan, 1991). Indigenous cultures value oral tradition whereas knowledge and ways of knowing in most European cultures have included written literate media (Sheridan, 1991). "The attachment of 'oral' and 'literate' to a distinction between cultures is a shorthand reference to two related things, history and legitimacy. Literacy and orality are valued and legitimized differently, and the difference in how we have valued those is part of our joint
history" (p.23). Sheridan goes on to argue that teaching literacy in school is a positive thing everyone can agree on, but the issue is what the consequences are for Aboriginal students when one assumes that print literacy has priority over everything else. Children around the world respond positively to storytelling, and Aboriginal children are no less enthusiastic in their enjoyment of narrative tales as it is very consistent with their culture and traditions (Reyhner, 1992).

"If orality reflects how a mind behaves, it is vital to recognize the veneration in which silence is esteemed in oral cultures. Keeping in mind that the alphabet records only sounds, literate people regard silence as time unrepresentable in print or writing, and as an absence of meaningful sound" (Sheridan, 1991, p. 24). One of problems achieving academic success for Aboriginal children is that orality is not valued or examined in standardized tests that are frequently used to measure literary capabilities. These claims are supported by Purcell-Gates and Dahl, who found that those children who entered Kindergarten knowing more about print and its functions in the world were generally more successful with the formal literacy instruction they encountered in school, performed higher on achievement tests and were judged as more advanced readers and writers by their teachers (1991). Sulzby (1985) argues that "acquiring literacy necessitates that children reconceptualise language and that 'the acquisition of literacy can be said to involve a
transition from oral language to written” (Anderson & Matthews, 1999, p. 293).

**Language Acquisition**

Children start learning and developing language skills from the moment they are born, and the rate of progress and different modes of language acquisition have a strong influence on children’s development of emergent literacy (Holdaway, 1979; Wells, 1986; Huck et al., 2001). Research has demonstrated that exposure to books can have important benefits with lasting effects in a young child’s life (Kiefer, 1995; Huck, 2001) and has proven that children who are read to in preschool and in the early grades gain significantly in language and literacy development over the years (Wells, 1986; Kiefer, 1995). Children who arrive at school having had frequent exposure to books are well prepared to acquire literacy (Wells, 1986). “Early literacy educators long have operated on the premise that children’s language and literacy development is interwoven and continuous from infancy” (Galda et al., 1993, p. 73). Piaget (1969) states that a child builds up knowledge through interaction with the world. His theory of cognitive development, referred to as constructive structuralism, suggests that intellectual growth is a process of assimilating new experiences with existing mental structures to construct new knowledge. “It is now abundantly clear children differ widely in their acquired knowledge about books and reading at the time of school entry and that these differences are predictive of their
subsequent academic achievement in the early school years and beyond" (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994, p. 246). Children's language acquisition is a subconscious but actively constructive process in which they continuously intuit and try out the rules of the language around them; they acquire language for its purposes at the moment (Reyhner, 1992).

The family's view of literacy may well be affected by the world view of their subculture (Brice-Heath, 1983). Children who have had limited exposure to book reading and decontextualized uses of language are more likely to have problems in generating literary narrative and in talking about books and stories (Wells, 1986). "Minority children need to acquire these accepted forms to compete and succeed in the larger culture in which they are living, that is outside of their home culture" (Morrow, 1992, p. 252). Native children are certainly surrounded with the type of "environmental print" described by Goodman (1985), but have limited exposure to book reading and "ways of taking from books" (Brice-Heath, 1982) at home (Ward, Shook, & Marrion, 1993). In addition, it is important to note that research has found that children from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have had experiences with book reading at home (Sulzby, 1985; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Anderson & Matthews, 1999)

The development of Aboriginal language often does not follow the same continuum as European language learners, and learning the formal type of language used in schools is not part of their cultural background.
"We have heard, read, and even said many times over the last 25 years that quality education for Our people must be based on our culture and on history, yet we continue to base education on white, urban culture and history" (Kirkness, 1996, p. 13).

The more formal the language, the more articulate and larger the vocabulary, the brighter the person is perceived to be. Students from uneducated households, however, have limited the opportunities to develop an extended vocabulary. The spoken vocabulary to which the student is exposed is more frequently in casual register (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). "From the beginning of our experience with formal education, we have had it drummed into us that education was about mastering the '3Rs'. We are told that if we cannot read, 'rite, or do 'rithmetic', we are doomed for failure" (Kirkness, 1996, p. 12). A crucial part of student achievement in school is directly related to the ability to have formal command of standard English (Zarry, 1991). Slocumb and Payne (2000) suggest that students from poverty manifest language abilities differently from middle class students in three major ways: registers of language, discourse patterns and story structure.

Research has been done supporting the need for changing the definition of literacy to include non-standard methods of acquiring literacy that are more common in the Aboriginal culture, such as oral literacy, print literacy and recognition of signs and symbols that are present in the home and community (Sheridan, 1991; Kirkness, 1996;
These non-standard forms of literacy provide children with building blocks that assist them in gaining insights into what written language is used for and how it is patterned.

"Language experience is based on the premise that the ability to interpret written language is related directly to a child's ability to communicate by talking" (Zarry, 1991, p. 93). Zarry states that before students can learn to write, they must have something to say and goes on to suggest that teachers need to incorporate the children's background knowledge into their development of language. "Activities such as hunting, skinning, tanning, trapping, fishing, berry picking, making bannock, wild rice picking, dog sledding, powwow dancing, sweating and so forth, are often not included in other learning resources" (Zarry, 1991, p. 93). Teachers need to provide open language experiences in the classroom where children are able to talk, read, and write about experiences they are familiar with.

Kirkness (1996) describes a school in Winnipeg that is on the right track when it comes to changing the literacy experience for Aboriginal children. They changed the traditional 3Rs to rediscovering (research), respect, and recovering the culture and traditions of their people. Kirkness believes this is an important start on overhauling the existing system and developing new strategies and materials that will incorporate Aboriginal traditions and culture. "While it is important that Indian children know the values and beliefs of the core American culture as
embodied in its literature and history, it is equally important that Indian children be taught the content of their tribal cultures, including, if their parents desire, a knowledge of the tribe's language and oral tradition, which constitute the literature and history of many tribes” (Reyhner, 1992, p. 18).

**Lack of Aboriginal Student Success in School**

Research shows that there are many reasons, stemming from social, economic, and cultural differences, why Aboriginal students are often not successful at school. The literature documents a history of academic underachievement for Aboriginal peoples in North America. In Canada, the National Indian Brotherhood (1988) reported that “only 20% of First Nations students complete grade twelve as opposed to a national average of 70%” (p.80). Although this was reported over ten years ago, it appears that little progress has been made. Native students in Canada continue to drop out of school at a rate three times that of their non-Native peers. “In 1996, almost 15 percent of the Aboriginal people, aged 15-24 had not yet attained their Grade 9 standing, compared to the 2 percent of the non-Aboriginal population of similar age” (Saskatchewan Education, 2000, p. 69). The BC First Nations Education Council Report states that “no one should need a stack of statistics to know that many students of First Nations and Metis background are not achieving success in the public schools” (BC Education, 1999, p. 2). The report
goes on to state that the reason why many First Nation students are not successful in school is due to a complex set of factors. “The complexity arises when it is found that what was thought to be recognizable, is itself driven by something more puzzling and unique. Therein lies the complexity and the difficulty in finding easy answers” (BC Education, 1999 p. 3).

Battiste (1996) attributes the lack of success to a culturally biased provincial curriculum that is inadequate in meeting the needs of First Nation students and to the fact that little has been done to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedoms of Aboriginal people. “The curriculum taught has limited Aboriginal content, and school materials and policies may contain unintended bias against Aboriginal students” (Reed, 1999 p. 127). The BC Ministry of Education supports this claim by stating that the opportunity for cultural knowledge to be passed from elders to children was eliminated through residential schools, with cultural and economic disruption resulting in devaluation. As long as the cultural bias of schools and their practices remain unexamined and unchanged, the public schools will not be able to serve the needs of many students from indigenous cultures.

Cummins (1992) claims that Indian students throughout North America have experienced disproportional school failures in educational systems organized, administered and controlled by members of the dominant group. Educational failure is a result of the minority group’s
inherent inability to assimilate and adopt the prevailing group's idea of education. Teaching children as though they are all the same with similar cultures “robs children of their unique individuality. Good teaching requires that teachers understand and respect the individuality of all children. Neither appreciation nor respect are possible without knowing the children’s cultural and environmental backgrounds” (Garcia & Ahler, 1992, p. 14). But is this indeed happening? Research shows that change is slow, and, although there is talk of revamping provincial curricula, little has been done to actually develop a transformed curriculum (BC Education, 1999). Governments are aware of the need but are still trying to develop a plan of action. Many First Nation students (BC Education, 1999) tell of being alienated by the school system and say that those who are supposed to be listening to their concerns are not understanding what is being said, and, as a result, their needs are not being met.

Mclean (1991) states that although much has been written about the problems of students at risk of academic failure, historically, only a limited amount has been written about the school characteristics that contribute to the success of these students (as cited in Fukui, 1999, p. 30). Goodlad (1984) acknowledged that we know little about the styles of teaching and the kinds of classroom environments that work against student failure. Educational policy makers have called for change in dealing with these students, yet few recommendations are based on
actual studies of successful teachers of students at risk of educational failure. A major question that remains unanswered is why some teachers are successful with students at risk, particularly minority students, while others teachers are not (as cited in Fukui, 1999, p. 30).

"An equally important reason why teachers experience difficulties adjusting their teaching techniques for different learners is that the majority of them are members of the dominant culture, implementing programs designed primarily for mainstream students" (Reyes, 1992, p. 428).

Though the curriculum is very important for marginal students who often feel their lives and experiences are excluded from mainstream curricula (Fine 1987), research has proven that the teacher is the most important element for success of students at risk of academic failure (Reyes, 1992, & Fukui, 1999).

The BC First Nations Task Force reports that although the Ministry of Education advocates the integration of First Nation perspectives and studies from K-12, there is little evidence to show this is actually happening. "The Ministry has drafted a set of parallel topics for insertion into existing curriculum lessons, but they are very likely to be dismissed by already very busy teachers" (BC Education, 1999, p.3). What is apparently needed here is not more curriculum, but succinct advice as to how Aboriginal perspectives might be more easily incorporated into the ongoing everyday curriculum. "There is ample evidence that Native
students come to school with an approach to learning that is "culturally influenced" and often different from mainstream students, but our teaching approaches tend to remain the same" (Sawyer, 1991, p. 102).

The BC First Nations Task Force reports that other problems arise out of the social and economic context in which children live. Teachers know that the socioeconomic status of children greatly handicaps school performance. "Children from lower socioeconomic and non-mainstream cultural communities often exhibit somewhat poorer school achievement, and their less extensive knowledge of literacy is evident even by the time they begin school" (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994, p. 247). The Ministry of Education claims that "Today many people of Aboriginal descent live in poverty, whether on reserves or in urban communities. Research on students from all groups shows a high correlation between poverty and lack of success in school" (BC Education, 1999, p. 3).

An Indian and Northern Affairs study reports that socioeconomic factors equally affected both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academic success, but many more Aboriginal students dropped out of school than did non-Aboriginal students. "This suggests that First Nations students bring a difference to school that is not being accommodated in the school system. Students not succeeding at school will skip classes, come late and become more often absent until they finally get so far behind they quit. First Nations students do not differ in this respect, and they often
leave school when they become totally frustrated in their attempt to be academically successful" (BC Education, 1999, p. 5).

Reading Preference Studies

Few studies have explored the reading preferences and interests of Canadian children, and it appears that none have explored the reading preferences of Canadian Aboriginal children. The most relevant study is research that assessed the reading interests of fourth grade boys and girls with comparisons made between minority and non-minority children. The researchers found that non-minority children seemed to be interested in adventure and animals while minority children seemed to be interested in themes such as personal problems, multi-ethnic relationships and fine arts (Wolfson et al., 1984). They concluded that these results describing racial and gender differences in reading interests have several implications for educators, but educators should not constrain book choices and not stereotype one type of book for minority children and another type for non-minority children. Emphasizing self selection and recommending all kinds of books for all children can accommodate sex and racial differences in reading interests as well as overlapping interests (Wolfson et al., 1984).

A more recent study involved 17 fourth-grade children of mixed middle to low socioeconomic status living in a small U.S. city in upstate New York (Lehr, 1994). This study focused on students' interpretations
of books about children in countries where freedom was not an option and found that students identified strongly with the characters and terrors these characters faced. "They wrote and talked about their own confusion at great length and seemed to work through this confusion with the character. Reading these books presented a moral challenge to the students who seemed to think the world should be a safe place" (Lehr 2000, p.48). The researcher found that students frequently applied their own background information to inferences made about characters and their actions. Students developed empathy for characters and changed their perceptions on the basis of their background and personal experiences. They made connections from their lives to the characters and events in the books (Lehr, 2000). "Literature has the tremendous quality of allowing us to engage imaginatively in the lives of others. It enables us to move beyond our own experiences and ourselves. If we allow ourselves to respond to it fully, it can be a great educator. For those of us brought up mono-culturally, literature, which springs from outside our own boundaries, can be a lifeline" (Naidoo, 1995, p.16).

One study documented the preferences of Canadian middle grade children selecting for book themes, utilizing variables such as sex, community and grade levels. The researchers' goal was to "structure a frame of reference to aid teachers, librarians and reading specialists in identifying and stimulating reading interests" (Summers & Lukasevich, 1983 p. 348). Another study reported teachers' interest in finding out
how to more effectively motivate students to engage in reading. "This is a high priority because many students are at risk of reading failure for motivational reasons" (Koskinen, 1994, p. 176). This research team wanted to try to understand what motivated students to engage in reading, so they asked third and fifth graders to describe their reading preferences, habits and behaviours. Other studies support this field of research. "If students' preferences and interests are related to motivation and engagement with learning then this research has important implications for language arts research, curriculum and instruction" (Worthy et al., 1999, p.13). Researchers agree that, although beneficial, deciding what kinds of materials to provide to motivate students to read can be a challenge, especially when specific individual preferences can be hard to accommodate (Worthy et al, 1999; Koskinen, 1994; Harkrader & Moore, 1997). “School collections do not always match with their individual tastes; and this mismatch may be most marked for reluctant readers” (Worthy et al., 1999, p.13).

Outside of Canada there has been an abundance of research looking at the reading preferences of children, and many studies have used a wide variety of methods to try to measure these preferences. (Wolfson et al., 1984; Koskinen, 1994; Monson et al., 1996; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Worthy et al, 1999). Purves and Beach (1972) state that, "little research has been directed to which of these techniques if any, provides a more accurate picture of reading interests. Thus, different
techniques may have produced such different results that any
generalization about results from different studies is highly suspect” (p. 66-67).

One study based their methods of data collection on the findings of Purves and Beach (1972) as they proceeded to further investigate and identify the literature preferences of children (Harkrader & Moore, 1997). Their methods of data collection were reading records, library withdrawal records, book lists, interviews, paired comparisons, questionnaires and survey (p. 326). The researchers had students use a rating scale as they answered the orally administered questionnaire and added up the values obtained from the rating scales to reach their conclusion (Harkrader & Moore, 1997). These methods have been used extensively in the past and proved to be useful in determining the literature preferences of various samples of children (Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Purves and Beach, 1972). It is important to consider that “Preference studies have traditionally employed any of a wide variety of data-gathering methods, including, for example, open ended or close ended surveys, reading logs and analysis of bestseller lists” (Monson & Sebesta, 1991; Worthy et al., 1999, p. 13). One researcher cautions against researchers’ number counting in a preference study because it can obscure the richness of the responses (Lehr, 2000). Lehr goes on to say that quantitative research in this area can be too general because there is no data supporting the reasons behind the student’s preference. It is believed that qualitative
data is equally as valuable and simply counting the numbers of responses doesn't buttress or explain the categories (Lehr, 2000).

A qualitative study investigated reading preferences by developing "questionnaires for assessing three dimensions of motivation to read: self concept as a reader, value of reading and reasons for reading... [followed by] conversational interviews with the students.... to reveal insights that would have important implications for creating classroom environments that enhance motivation to read" (Koskinen, 1994, p.176). It has been proven that an effective method used to uncover children's reading preferences is interviews (Koskinen, 1994; Monson et al., 1996; Worthy et al., 1999). They are effective means of data collection because they allow the researcher to address and eliminate the limitations of book selection based on categories and uncover the reasons behind students literature preferences (Worthy et. al., 1999).

Other researchers chose to use qualitative methods, exploring literature questions children wanted to discuss, so that their study would not be restricted by preconceived procedures (Commeyras & Sumner, 1998). They did not wish to be constrained by preconceived research methodology, but rather to be free to explore as they attempted to construct a picture that would take shape as they collected and examined data (Commeyras & Sumner 1998).

Canadian researchers reported that "reading preferences and interests have proven to be difficult to conceptualize and measure, and
problems in conducting research in this area have been frequently discussed" (Summers & Lukasevich, 1983, p. 348). They question the value of such work as "much of the previous research focused on instrumentation and measurement techniques such as questionnaires (the most popular), interviews, checklists of various types, rating scales, direct observations, and forced-choice techniques such as paired comparisons. All the techniques have been found to have advantages and limitations" (Summers & Lukasevich, 1983, p. 349).

Many studies group books into thematic categories when assessing children’s preferences (Summers & Lukasevich, 1983; Wolfson et al., 1984; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Lehr, 2000). “Attaching a content theme or motif label to a book indicates a certain subjective judgement at times not totally accurate as to what the book is generally about” (Summers & Lukasevich, 1983, p. 349). They go on to suggest that until more sophisticated systems emerge, a theme approach is useful. The themes they used included: adventure, history/geography, animals, children/family, sports, humor, science, poetry, fantasy, biography, travel, romance, nature study and mystery (Summers & Lukasevich, 1983). The use of these categories is supported in additional research. Another study examined students’ preferences of the categories of adventure, animals, fine and applied arts, fantasy, family life and children, famous people, machines and applied science, personal problems, physical science, plants, social studies and sports (Wolfson et
al., 1984). Most of the studies come up with some type of preferred categories or themes, but very few provide data that explains why the children prefer a certain type of book.

The implication of the research discussed above is that educators need to provide an array of materials from which students can choose books that are personally interesting, resulting in improved attitude and reading competence (Wolfson et al., 1984; Harkrader & Moore, 1997). Research shows that when students are both interested in what is being taught and have access to materials that interest them, students’ learning, motivation and effort towards reading increases and attitudes improve (Hidi, 1991; Schiefele, 1991; Worthy et al., 1999).

Another study states that students’ preferences must be addressed in order to capture their attention and engagement and, thus, to foster conditions for learning (Koskinen, 1994). There are proven benefits of using material that students prefer. Providing students with access to this range of reading material is crucial, and “[teachers and librarians] can only make wise selections when acquiring reading material for the school classrooms and libraries if they are knowledgeable about their children’s reading preferences” (Harkrader & Moore, 1997, p. 334). Numerous studies have concluded that achievement is related to the interest in literature and a good reading program will provide books written at different reading levels in all interest areas to accommodate

**Improving Education: What Needs to be Done**

Marie Battiste, a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, makes a call for change in provincial curricula to meet the needs of the growing Aboriginal population. "As Aboriginal people approach the 21st century, the need is great for a transformed education that enriches our character and dignity, that emerges from one's own roots and cultural experience, from which a voice once powerless can be raised, and where diversity is seen as an asset, not a source for prejudice" (Battiste, 1996, p. 22). Kirkness supports these statements when she says, "we must seize the opportunity to frame our education in our context. We must look within ourselves, within our communities and our nations to determine which values are important to us, the content of what should be learned, and how it should be learned" (1996, p. 11).

Culturally appropriate curriculum can be developed to match the realities and world view of the Aboriginal students, while using their traditional culture as a guideline for making these changes (Sawyer, 1991). Lisa Head of Wacihk School, Shoal Lake First Nation, claimed that "Many of our Indian languages are being lost and our cultures are being eroded. Language instills a sense of belonging and makes our hearts proud. To keep one language and culture is not simple. We must
endure” (Saskatchewan Sage, 1998, p. 3). Cummins (1992) eloquently explains that it is obvious that society’s interactions with Aboriginal students have failed to build education around their enormously rich traditions and way of life, and this has deprived students of a sense of pride in their own cultures, a necessity for their academic growth.

Dawson (1988) believes that although the education system has done much to hurt the Native peoples of the past, today it may become the avenue to change the major social, economic, and psychological difficulties facing Aboriginal people. It may indeed build bridges of understanding and in so doing help restore pride and confidence to Canada’s Aboriginal people (Dawson, 1988). Chief Dan George once posed: “What do we want? We want first of all to be respected and to feel we are people of worth. We want an equal opportunity to succeed in life. When you meet my children in your classroom,” he said, “respect each one for what he is: a child of our father in heaven and your brother” (Gilliland, 1986, p.63).

Many provinces and school boards have worked to reduce the problems facing Aboriginal students in school. The Vancouver school district employs First Nation support workers to assist the 2000 Aboriginal students in their schools and has developed a special program to reach out to Aboriginal street kids (Reed, 1999). Saskatchewan has developed an action plan to train and recruit more Aboriginal teachers and incorporate more Aboriginal content into the curriculum. “In both
Vancouver and Saskatchewan, teachers are trained in cross cultural awareness and alternative approaches for educating Aboriginal children” (Reed, 1999). Swisher and Deyhle (1989) make specific suggestions that “have special significance for teachers of Indian students; be aware of students’ background knowledge and experiences” (Sawyer, 1991, p. 102).

The BC First Nations Task Force has set a priority of goals for British Columbia school systems:

- Better ways of keeping track of the problems of First Nations students is needed.

- Better ways to fully engage every classroom teacher with the problem that First Nations cultural differences present must also be priority, one that will result in fresh insights and methods.

- The persisting problem of reading fluency, requires more than what is being done if First Nations students are to share in any successes.

- That the perceptions held by First Nations peoples are not finding their way into the curriculum day is worrying to say the least and some action must be taken to see that this is done. (BC Education, 1999)

Many problems Aboriginal children experience in school stem from an exposure to literature and storytelling activities that are very different from their own literary traditions. Delpit (1991) explains how some researchers suggest that to begin addressing and overcoming these problems it is necessary 1) to value and rejoice in the home cultures of these children’s diverse backgrounds, 2) to build identity and self esteem
honouring and transmitting cultural values to all students, 3) to encourage teachers to plan instructional strategies with an understanding of other cultures so that all children can benefit from school, 4) to provide all children with a balance of diverse literature and practices, including literacy skills, to empower them to go outside their own immediate world with the ability to succeed.

BC First Nations Task Force has developed a vision:

"Each child has a gift. Look for that gift and how to help nurture it. Strengthen the spirit of the children and help them to find balance and ways of being that are rooted in land, community, and culture. Help them to succeed in education and in a career, as well as to make positive lifestyle choices grounded in language and culture. Provide an opportunity for them to have a choice of how and where to live and work" (BC Education, 1999).
Summary of Research

Teachers, librarians, and parents must see the oral history tradition of Aboriginal people as a positive rather than a negative and, through the choice of appropriate literature, motivate and encourage Aboriginal children to build on their literary tradition in a manner that will allow them to succeed in situations using today's curricula. The literature review has demonstrated the need for research investigating Aboriginal students' picture book preferences and past research indicates that discovering children's picture book preferences will assist teachers and librarians when they are selecting and purchasing books for their students.
Chapter III
Methodology and Procedure

Introduction

The goal of this research study is to investigate the picture book preferences of grade four Aboriginal students. Research has found that students frequently apply personal knowledge to make inferences about characters and their actions and make connections from their lives to the characters and events in books (Lehr, 2000). The purpose of this research is to gather and examine data about students' preferences so that teachers and librarians may wisely select books that are of interest to Aboriginal students. It is important for educators to be aware of the literature that is preferred by children in order to make their educational experiences more meaningful (Harkrader & Moore, 1997). Providing literature that is of interest and relevant to Aboriginal students will be the first step in working towards increasing their literacy skills.

Research Setting: School and Community Culture

The research study took place in an inner city elementary school located in a large city in the heart of the Canadian prairies. The school has 350 students from kindergarten to grade eight. Approximately
seventy-five percent of the students are of Aboriginal descent and the majority come from families who live below the poverty level. Racism is not an issue in the school as students do not differentiate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. As well as dealing with the challenges associated with low socio-economic status, the school has a very high student mobility rate that must be dealt with on a continual basis. Many of the students have poor attendance, which is a constant battle for the school to overcome.

The school has had a history of violence and academic failure, but for the past six years a new leadership team has turned the school into a happy, peaceful, child-centered institution that preaches and lives a program of non-violence. A number of innovative programs have been introduced in the school such as unusual split grades (4/7 & 2/5) designed to combat discipline problems common in single grade classrooms. The older students serve as role models and become responsible for guiding the younger students in a family like atmosphere. The younger students look up to their older peers with respect, building their self esteem and motivating them to act in a more mature manner than might otherwise be expected. The school has switched from a traditional school day to a compacted school day with no unsupervised recess or noon breaks in order to provide more time on task for students and to decrease the chance of misbehaviour. Academic performance, as
measured by student portfolios, in house testing using rubrics or CTBS scores, has improved measurably over the years the new school program has been in effect.

The section of the city where the subject school is located is populated by low income families, many of whom receive social assistance. The community has a history of violence and crime, and in the last year a police sub-station has opened within a block of the school. The neighborhood population is transient with families moving from the country to the city and then back again or to other areas of the city. The majority of homes are rental units, many of them owned by the provincial government or one of the First Nations housing organizations.

The school employs a full time community worker, has staff that operate a daily breakfast and snack program and, as well, has a police resource officer who visits the school on an almost daily basis. All students at the school are able to avail themselves of a community run lunch program.

It should be noted that the researcher is a tenured teacher on leave of absence from the school where the research was conducted. The researcher understands the school culture and atmosphere and has an inside knowledge of the protocol and procedures of the school. The teachers at the school were very flexible and supportive of the research study and accommodated the researcher in every way possible. The
researcher was at a significant advantage having worked full time in the subject school for two years and was welcomed back into the environment as one of their own. The students remembered the researcher as a teacher and resumed a close, trusting relationship almost immediately upon return, which greatly increased research reliability.

Sample

The subject school was chosen because it has a high population of Aboriginal students in an urban environment. The researcher used a non-probabilistic sampling procedure of purposive sampling. "Nonprobability sampling is one in which the probability of including population elements is unknown. Usually, not every element in the population has a chance of being selected" (McMillan, 2000, p. 108). "In purposive sampling the researcher selects particular individuals or cases because they will be particularly informative about the topic. Based on the researcher's knowledge of the population, a judgment is made to include cases that will be information rich" (McMillan, 2000, p.110). The accessible population was made up of grade four Aboriginal students attending the school where the research study took place. The numbers for the accessible population for the 2000-2001 school year were twenty-one grade four self-declared Aboriginal students out of a total of thirty-
two grade four students. A sampling frame, with a list of eligible participants, was obtained from each of the grade four classrooms indicating the number of self-declared Aboriginal students.

The next step was to select the primary subjects for the research study. The school had three classrooms with grade four students; two 4/7 splits and one 4/5 split. Each of the three teachers, after agreeing to participate in the study, was asked to identify four Aboriginal students from their classroom who showed some evidence of reading ability. The teachers were also asked to avoid the selection of students who had poor attendance and to attempt to obtain a representative gender sample with approximately half female and half male students. Once an initial list of subjects was established, each student was personally invited to participate in the study and was given a parent permission letter to take home. All 12 students returned the letters signed with parent permission to join the study. The sample selection was made up of five girls and seven boys for a total of 12 participants. These students were selected because they were 'key informants, who are particularly knowledgeable about the topic" (McMillan, 2000, p. 166). "The goal of any qualitative study is to generate depth of description and understanding. Consequently, it is better to select a few entities for in-depth study rather than a large number that would be studied only superficially" (McMillan, 2000, 268).
Grade four students were selected for the research study because they are generally old enough to be able to read on their own but still enjoy picture books. The researcher chose to look at picture books because they can be read and shared in one sitting.

Research Materials

A crucial decision had to be made about which books were to be used in the study. The researcher decided to use Canadian children's literature, which had been published in 1999. Use of new books increased the internal validity of the study as it reduced the chance of students having had previous exposure to the picture books. It was decided that half of the picture books used in the study would be chosen from the Canadian Children's Book Centre 1999 Our Choice Catalogue. The other half of the books would be Canadian books published in 1999 that were reviewed in the Quill & Quire; Canada's Magazine of Book News and Reviews, but not included in the 1999 Our Choice Catalogue.

The Canadian Children's Book Centre is a national non-profit organization founded in 1976 to promote the reading, writing and illustrating of Canadian children's books. The Our Choice Catalogue is an annual guide to the best new Canadian children's books, magazines, audio cassettes, videos and CD-ROMs. The picture books which are
included have been selected by a committee drawn from various cities in Canada whose members are experts in the field of children's literature. Eligible materials for selection as non-Our Choice Catalogue books include all Canadian children's books produced in the past year and listed in the 1999 Quill & Quire; Canada's Magazine of Book News and Reviews.

The books were selected based on the suitability of their reading level, appropriateness to fit into the four categories identified in consultation with children's literature expert Dr. Ronald Jobe and their availability from the University of British Columbia Education Library. The four categories are books with Aboriginal content, realism, fantasy, and information books.

The researcher compiled a preliminary bibliography of sixty-eight books that fit the criteria described previously. Fifteen fantasy books, fifteen realism books, six information books and eight books with Aboriginal content were chosen from the 1999 Our Choice Catalogue (Appendix A). The researcher used the abridged table of random numbers (Sommer & Sommer, 1991) to shortlist the books that would be used in the study. The results were six fantasy, six realism, six information and six books with Aboriginal content from the 1999 Our Choice Catalogue. The same process was repeated with the preliminary bibliography of 1999 Canadian books from the 1999 Quill and Quire.
Reviews that were not in the Our Choice Catalogue. Fifteen fantasy/realism books, six information books and three books with Aboriginal content were chosen (Appendix B). The researcher applied the same table of numbers to randomly select books for use in the study. The results were twelve fantasy/realism, six information, and three books with Aboriginal content. A total selection of forty-five books was chosen because it was a manageable number but still large enough for patterns to emerge and would present students with a large selection to choose from. The exact data of the book category and bibliographic information is provided for each book so that the study possesses transferability and can be replicated.

Creating categories and then choosing books so that an equal number could be placed in each category was not an easy task. The decisions were necessarily arbitrary and the researcher is aware that others working in the same field might see the categories and titles placed in them quite differently. Many of the categories overlap and it could be argued that some titles are fantasy, some are realism and some could fit under both categories. A number of the Aboriginal books could be classified as fantasy or realism, but for the purpose of this study were kept in their own category because there were simply not enough Canadian 1999 books with Aboriginal content available to accommodate the three other categories of books.
The researcher and an independent assistant, a retired children's library and teacher assistant, randomly divided the forty-five books chosen for the study into three sets based on the categories, attempting to strike a balance in the three sets; half the books were from the 1999 Our Choice Catalogue and half were other Canadian books reviewed in the 1999 Quill and Quire Reviews. Each set of books included three with Aboriginal content, four realism books, four fantasy books and four information books.

Research Design and Procedures

The research was conducted in February of the 2000-2001 school year. The qualitative study consisted of descriptive research with a goal to "adequately represent the phenomenon of interest as it occurs in the population of interest" (Palys, 1997, p. 80). "The goal of qualitative research is to understand participants from their point of view. Thus, in a qualitative study of what motivates students, it would be important to focus on what the students said and did, to describe motivation using words and actions of the students" (McMillan, 2000, p. 254).

During the first two days of the study, the researcher observed all three grade four classrooms. Observations were recorded and field notes taken on the school culture, classroom atmosphere and teacher student interaction. "Observation allows the description of behavior as it occurs
naturally. Observation of behavior in natural settings also allows the researcher to take into account important contextual factors that may influence the interpretation and use of the results” (McMillan, 2000, 162).

Phase 1-Introduction

The researcher asked the grade four teachers to select four Aboriginal students from each class to participate in the study. The twelve participants were divided into groups according to their classroom so that all students had an equal opportunity to explore, read, and respond to the books in a small group setting.

Late in the morning of day two, the researcher brought the participants together and explained in general terms, the direction the study was to take. The students were shown a sample book (not one to be used in the study) and invited to look through it and vote whether or not they thought it would be interesting. The researcher then read the book and led a group discussion.

Once the initial demonstration with the large group of grade fours was completed, the students chosen were told they were part of a special reading group that would meet several times a week to explore, read and respond to a large number of picture books. The researcher told them that they were going to be expert judges of what are good books for kids
to read. The researcher explained that there were no right or wrong answers and that the purpose of the special reading group was to find out what type of books children like to read as it is important for teachers to know.

**Phase 2-Small Group Orientation and Introduction to Response**

In the afternoon of day two the researcher worked with the four students from each classroom, spending equal amounts of time with each group. Time and scheduling had to remain flexible, as the researcher made concessions and arrangements to accommodate the teachers and school schedules. The study took place in a previously arranged location determined by the teachers and principal. It was consistent for the duration of the research study.

The initial session began with the researcher, in collaboration with the students, defining the word "response" so that every student had a similar understanding of the meaning of the word. "Responding to literature is a complex process involving readers, texts, and contexts. Responding to literature has to do with what we make of a text as we read, how it becomes alive and personal for us, the pleasure and satisfaction we feel, and the way in which we display these feelings" (Galda, 1988, p. 92). The students looked up "response" in the *Gage Canadian Intermediate Dictionary* and reported that it is defined as "to
answer or react”. The children were then asked to brainstorm a list of different ways they could respond to a book and those ideas were recorded for further reference.

The researcher introduced a book to the group of children in order to demonstrate and model ways of responding to a book. The book read in the introduction session was similar to the type of books to be used in the study but was not included in the group of books used in the study. The researcher showed the students the book (the same book was used with each group of students) and modeled a manner of reading. The students were invited to read the title and relate it to the cover illustrations. They were then directed to view the end papers, the back cover, and from the information garnered predict whether or not they would like the book. The book was then read and the students were asked to share their thoughts and reactions. They were asked a number of questions such as:

“How did the book make you feel?”

“Did you like the book?”

“What were the reasons you liked the book?”

“Why didn’t you like the book?”

“What were the reasons you did not like the book?”

The book was shared a second time and students were asked to expand on their initial responses by answering questions such as:
“Did your feelings change when the book was read a second time?”
“Did you notice anything new or different?”
“Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?”
“Does the book tell a good story?”
“Is there action and movement in the story?”

The researcher asked the students to look at the brainstormed list of ways of responding and they discussed the different ways one could respond to the book they just read. “Children’s perceptions and understandings are revealed in many different ways-as they choose and talk about books, and as they write, paint, play, or take part in other classroom activities” (Huck et al. p. 51, 1997.)

The researcher repeated the demonstration on day three to ensure the students had a clear understanding of how they could explore, read, and respond to a picture book. The students brainstormed words that described how they felt after reading a book. The researcher recorded everything the students said on a large piece of chart paper so that the students could refer back to the feeling words as needed.

The researcher explained to the students that their opinion was important and that they must realize that not all books are worth reading. They were told that the purpose of this special reading group was to help the researcher discover what were good books to read. The researcher told the students not to waste their time reading a book that
didn't interest them. The researcher and the students discussed how to rate a book and again it was emphasized that there were no incorrect answers. Whatever the students said would be an appropriate answer. The participants were introduced to a rating scale of 1 to 5 so that they understood the idea that one book can be better than another. A score of 1/5 means, "yuck I shouldn't have wasted my time"; 2/5 "the book wasn't very good but there were one or two things I liked"; 3/5 "the book is ok, I would tell a friend to read it but I wouldn't read it again"; 4/5 "a very good book, I would read it again"; and 5/5 "excellent, awesome, this is one of the best books I have ever read".

The researcher demonstrated how to view a book and make a quick judgment. The students practiced picking up a book, looking at the cover, reading the title, turning it over and looking at the back of the book, looking at the cover once more, formulating a question or idea of something they wanted to learn or find out by reading the book and then flipping through the pages of the book scanning the pictures.

The researcher presented five books, Melted Star Journey, My Rows and Piles of Coins, A Screaming Kind of Day, The Legend of the Salmon Boy and Hannah and the Seven Dresses, and had the children look at each of the five books for one minute, using the process described above. Once the children had browsed through all five books, the researcher asked them to pick one that they thought looked most
interesting and that they would like to read. The students were asked why they picked a certain book and what interested them or what they were curious about. After the book was read, the students described how they felt about the book and gave it a score based on the rating scale.

Phase 3—Paired Sessions

On day four the twelve students were taken to work in groups of two to ensure that they would have equal opportunities to look at all the books for the same amount of time. The participants spent two sessions (forty-five minutes to one hour) with each of the three groups of fifteen books. The students were brought into the room where fifteen books from group number one were randomly laid out on the floor. The students were instructed to sit down and look at books they thought were interesting, using the viewing process. The students were told that after they had finished browsing they were to choose two books that they were most interested in looking at further. They were asked to select books that were of interest to them and then, from the two books, choose one book to read and respond to verbally, visually and/or in writing.

The researcher observed and recorded notes while the children browsed through the books and made their selections. The researcher facilitated and observed the group sessions without providing any direct
instruction. All sessions were video taped for further clarification and observation by the researcher at a later time.

The researcher had previously coded the sets 1,2,3 and the books A, B, C, etc., for easy identification. A record was kept of what books were chosen, how many times each book was picked up, the approximate length of time spent with each book, and when feasible, a general description of what features generated particular interest. The duration of each session was forty-five minutes to one hour long.

Book Selection:

In session one, using the first group of fifteen books, students viewed, browsed and picked one book to read. They read the book silently and then were asked to describe what interested them in the book, why they picked it and how they felt after they read the book. The questions were as follows:

What book did you pick?

Why did you pick this book?

What is it that interested you?

What were you curious about?

What was the story about?

Does the book tell a good story?

After you read the book did you still like it?
How did it make you feel?
What did you like about it?
Is the book realistic, fantasy, information or something else?
Did you learn anything?
Does the book seem similar to your life in anyway?
Does it remind you of anything?
What character did you like the best?
What character did you not like?
Would you tell a friend to read this book? Why?
Rate the book.

Responding:

In session two, the students were brought back to the room where the same fifteen books were laid out. They were told that they would have to respond to one book on paper. The researcher told the students that they could choose a new book to read and respond to, or they could review and respond to the book they read the day before. The students responded to the book of their choice by drawing or writing and were asked to discuss/explain their responses with the researcher. During this time the researcher took notes and video taped the sessions for further clarification of the responses.
Session one (book selection) and session two (responding) were repeated in the same format for each of the three groups of books, for a total of six sessions with each student.

**Phase 4- Individual Interviews**

After all the sessions were complete, the researcher took the participants individually to the research room where all forty-five books were laid out. The students were asked to think back to the sessions they had completed and were reminded that the purpose of this study was to find out what type of books children like to read and their reasons for choosing those books. The students were encouraged to take one last browse through any of the books and they were given time to pick up and look through as many as they wished.

The participants were interviewed individually to further investigate their picture book preferences and explore the reasons behind their book selection. The researcher encouraged responses with positive comments, nods and signs of affirmation, but without influencing the responses in anyway. Students were reminded periodically that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the emphasis was on discovering their own ideas. “When the focus is on finding out what children are thinking, it is important to begin with general questions that...”
invite talk and do not suggest the teacher's own answers” (Huck et al. p.64, 1997).

Final Interview Questions:
If you could have one of these books to take home which one would it be?

  What made you choose this book? Why?
  What were you interested in?
  What was the best part of this book?
  What did you like about the story?
  How does it make you feel?
  What did you think of the pictures?
  What does the story make you think of? Remind you of?
  Why was it better than any of the other books?
  What were some of the other books you liked?
  What made these books good?
  Is there one book that you didn’t like?
  What was it about the book that you didn’t like?
  Are there any other books you wouldn’t want to read?
  What didn’t you like about them or what turned you off?
Data Collection

The methods of data collection consisted of observation, field notes, research diary, video tape observation and interview. The use of more than one data source reduced the potential for bias and the use of triangulation techniques strengthened the validity of the study. “Multiple methods allow for triangulation, which is the strongest type of evidence for the credibility of findings” (McMillan, 2000, 276). The researcher also used unstructured observation “reporting in a narrative fashion any objectives relevant to the research objectives” (Palys, 1997, p. 207). As well, reactions, responses and interactions with the literature were recorded. Notes were written when it was feasible, and during the exploration/response sessions a video tape recording of each session was used to enhance the researcher’s ability to transcribe the students’ responses. “This strategy provides maximal flexibility and can produce records with a comprehensiveness and richness not matched by other techniques” (Palys, 1997, p. 207).

A limitation of the researcher’s unstructured observation may be the unintentional selection of data to record, which will imply unrecognized bias. Two independent objective observers were invited to watch the video tapes, record observations, and assist in the initial tallying of the book choices. They also read over the raw data to verify
the transcription from the video tapes and added their own insights about patterns that developed throughout the book selection process.

Field notes were taken throughout the study, documenting the time and place of observation, the people present and the interaction, as well as any other details of interest. In addition, a research diary documenting “the development of perceptions and insights across the different stages of the research process” (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p. 11) was kept. It is one of the most important methods because it ensures that the reflection and analysis is not artificially separated from the data collection (Altricher et al., 1993). The aim of the diary, according to Ramsay (1999), is qualitative description and interpretation from the inside rather than quantitative measures and prediction of variables from the outside. A diary containing personal accounts of observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, ideas and explanations was also kept on a continuous basis with properly dated entries that were used to form a substantial portion of the narrative data.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with each of the participants. These interviews produced a high response rate and the chance to clarify ambiguities or misunderstandings. “Interviews are used to gather information that cannot be obtained from field observations and to verify observations. Their purpose was to explain the participants’ point of view, how they think, and how they interpret and explain their
behavior within a given setting” (McMillan, 2000, p. 262). Interviews tend to seek a greater depth of response and open-ended questions allow for the respondents’ “voices” to be heard. A limitation of this method is the chance of reactive bias, but the researcher was aware of this and was careful not to encourage or lead the respondents to respond in any particular way.

Open-ended questions were used to hear the respondents’ opinions about the books in the study. Closed questions were also asked to obtain the data that was needed to understand the students’ picture book preferences. Palys (1997) supports this method: “a useful strategy involves actually combining open-ended questions and structured items. A technique known as funneling: first asking broad, open-ended questions on a topic and following up with successively narrower, more well defined structured questions” (p. 166). The internal validity of the study was increased because the researcher’s role as a participant researcher was explained and recorded as time was spent with the participants building rapport and observing them.
Data Analysis

Once all the data was gathered and assembled, a content analysis of the data was conducted to look for emerging patterns, key concepts and themes. The researcher checked these patterns, concepts and themes against the objectives and research questions to see if any inferences could be made. "[Rather], the data are gathered first and then synthesized inductively to generate generalizations. Theory is developed from bottom up. This approach is important because the qualitative researcher wants to be open to new ways of understanding" (McMillan, 2000, p. 254). "Content analysis requires the researcher to have some clear idea of what he or she is after" (Palys, 1997, p. 228). The data was recorded in its entirety, detailing the verbal and non-verbal responses of the children. To support the data, tables were drawn recording the number of times a book was picked up, how many boys and how many girls picked up each book, the students' first choices and the book choices made during the final interview.

The researcher reviewed the raw data, colour coding recurring categories and themes in the students' responses to assist in further examination of the data and to determine if one particular theme was preferred over the others. This qualitative form of analysis was one that "begins with a well-defined question that is used to focus analysis of sample material defined by the research question as relevant" (Palys,
1997, p. 239). For analysis, the composite data was coded and sorted under the following categories: 1) Aboriginal books, 2) fantasy books, 3) information books, and 4) realism books. The researcher worked through the process of “data condensation”, resisting the temptation to impose personal meaning on the content. Categories were formed and evidence was divided into written sections that provided support for the findings and facilitated in a discussion of the results. Content analysis was limited because the researcher was confined to work within identified categories under the assumption that themes would emerge from the data. The validity of the study was strengthened as the researcher had two independent objective observers identify and verify the coding, categorization of students’ responses, interpretation of emerging themes and resulting conclusions.

Once the data analysis was completed, a descriptive report was written detailing the findings and the discussion that resulted. Conclusions and recommendations for future selections of literature based on the results of the study were then made.

A limitation in the study is that the findings are only generalizable to the target population. This is not to say that teachers of other minority groups won’t benefit from the study, but it is hard to make concrete transfers. The researcher tried to account for differences in the participants’ reading programs, teachers, backgrounds and previous
exposure to literature through recording of observations, but there was no way to know or control the effect it could have on the outcomes.

A concern was raised before beginning the study as to how the reading groups would be perceived to the non-Aboriginal students in the class. The researcher at an early date discussed this possible problem with the principal and teachers to see how they wished to handle the situation. This proved not to be a problem. The school has a high percentage of Aboriginal students and race is not an issue. The teachers explained to all grade four students that the students selected to read with the researcher were picked because it was their turn to participate in a reading group. This inner city school frequently has guest readers, volunteers and resource room teachers pulling students from the classroom to read. The students are used to being taken from the classroom individually or in small groups to read with an adult other than their teacher.

Another perceived limitation is the fact that the researcher is of another race, putting into question the reliability of the research. In the past, people have questioned the authenticity of research conducted by someone who is not of the same culture, race, gender or social class as those they are researching.
Palys suggests that,

"The key is to ensure that, when we do engage in such research, we are especially sensitive to issues of voice, going out of our way to make the research a collaborative enterprise, seeking input at all stages from those who will be most affected and whose perspectives we seek to represent. A non-Aboriginal social scientist should be able to do research dealing with Aboriginal issues—indeed, not doing research on such an important topic seems tacit acceptance of injustice" (1997, p. 206).

Because the researcher had previously taught in the school and had developed a rapport and positive reputation with the students and the school community, it was possible to move quickly into the work of the study without a lengthy warm-up or introductory period. Since leaving the school, the researcher had returned on a number of occasions as a guest at functions and as a guest lecturer in the classrooms. The teachers and students, including the participants in the study, saw the researcher as one of their own and as a member of the school community.
Summary

The research study took place in a prairie inner city school and utilized as a subject group, twelve grade four Aboriginal students. The purpose of the study was to examine students' picture book preferences and then determine the reasons behind their choices. The forty-five picture books selected for use in the study fit into four categories: Aboriginal, realism, fantasy, and information and were Canadian books published in 1999. The researcher conducted informal introductory sessions with all the participants, modeling ways of responding to books. In the first formal session, participants browsed and looked through the first set of books and selected books that were of interest to them. In the second session the students chose one book to read and respond to through writing and/or drawing. Session one and session two were repeated using the same format for each of the three groups of books, for a total of six sessions with each student.

The methods of data collection consisted of observation, field notes, video tape observation and interviews. Once all the data was gathered, it was assembled, analyzed and divided into sections according to the themes and to the patterns that emerged from the students' responses. A descriptive report was written detailing the findings and discussing the results.
Chapter IV
Presentation of Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The study was designed to have twelve grade four Aboriginal students examine forty-five books and then select the three titles they most preferred. The students were instructed to read their top choice from each of the three sets of books and afterwards write and/or draw a response to the books, explaining their reasons for the selections. At the end of the study, a final session was conducted with each individual student where they were asked to select one book out of the forty-five as the one they would want to take home. The students were encouraged to explain their preference and reasons for the selection.

The research findings will be presented in the same order as the three research questions were posed in the first chapter. The picture book preferences will be presented first, followed by the genres and books in those categories that had the greatest appeal for the students. Illustration preferences, content preferences and personal connections emerged as the specific factors which determined picture book choice. The relevant factors will be presented with the selected books in each genre.

In order to ensure confidentiality, the students were identified by random letters and a gender abbreviation indicating male or female. For
example, student one became J/M, student two became C/M, while student three became S/F.

Table 1 contains the subject identifiers for the twelve students who participated in the research study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Subject Identifier</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student One/Male</td>
<td>B/M</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Two/Male</td>
<td>C/M</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Three/Male</td>
<td>J/M</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Four/Male</td>
<td>M/M</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Five/Male</td>
<td>D/M</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Six/Male</td>
<td>S/M</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Seven/Male</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Eight/Female</td>
<td>B/F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Nine/Female</td>
<td>S/F</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Ten/Female</td>
<td>C/F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Eleven/Female</td>
<td>A/F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Twelve/Female</td>
<td>G/F</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to clarify terminology, in this case, the slang frequently used by the students. The terms “cool” and “deadly” were often used to describe a story, the illustrations, or how they felt about a book. The researcher asked for an explanation of what the terms meant and was informed that “cool” and “deadly” meant “very good, awesome, exciting, excellent”. The research findings were structured around the participants’ responses. Although the spelling has been occasionally
edited for clarity, the students' sentence structure, in both written and oral responses, remains intact to capture the full essence of meaning.

**Book Selection Findings**

In the study, students began the selection process by browsing through the first of three sets of fifteen books. They were invited to view and skim through any books they found interesting. The researcher recorded the number of times each book was picked up and by which student. Table 2 presents the initial selections from the first set of books. It indicates the total number of times each book was chosen, the number of boys and girls who picked up each book and whether or not the book was from the Our Choice Catalogue.
Table 2

First Set of Books: Initial Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Our Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaur: Digging Up a Giant</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreamstones</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple Batter</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crazy for Horses</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jillian Jiggs and the Secret Surprise</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada From A to Z</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lonely Inukshuk</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lost Crown of Meleor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Memory House</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf and the Seven Little Kids</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Poppa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping Boy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are The People</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me &amp; Mr. Mah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings show that the top five books chosen from the first set of books included: 1) Dreamstones, an Aboriginal book, that tied as the number one book as it was chosen by nine of the twelve participants, six boys and three girls; 2) Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant, an information book, was similarly popular as it was selected by seven boys and two girls; 3) Apple Batter, a fantasy, was chosen eight times, by five boys and three girls; 4) Jillian Jiggs and the Secret Surprise, an imaginative book, was picked by seven participants, three boys and four girls; 5) Crazy for Horses, an information book, was selected by seven students, two boys and five girls.
Table 3

First Set of Books: Final Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Our Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreamstones</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jillian Jiggs and the Secret Surprise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In session two, students were asked to choose one book out of the fifteen to read thoroughly and then respond to through writing and/or drawing. The students were given the option of replacing the book they first selected if they decided they did not like it, but each participant was content with the book first selected. Table 3 shows the books the students chose to read and respond to out of the first set of fifteen books.

As was the case in the initial selection session, the top two books selected were Dreamstones and Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant. Out of the nine initial selections, five students, two boys and three girls, chose Dreamstones while five boys chose to read and respond to Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant. Apple Batter was initially selected (as shown in Table 2), but this non-Our Choice book was not chosen to be read by any of the participants. “The boy in the picture looks silly trying to hit an apple out of the tree. I don’t like it” (D/M). Two girls chose to read and respond to Jillian Jiggs and the Secret Surprise. “I love Jillian Jiggs books. She is so cool!” (S/F). “It is imagined.... It looks fun! (C/F).

Although Crazy For Horses was popular in the initial selection, no one
selected it as the book they wanted to read. "I like the pictures, they look realistic, but it is way too long to read" (B/F, G/F, & A/F). One of the boys said, "I don't want to read this, but my sister would, she likes horses" (B/M).

Table 4
Second Set of Books: Initial Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Our Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comets</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firedancers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Senses</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Four Lions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Blizzard</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonetalker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy of the Deeps</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raven's Call</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lucy Doll</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing the Day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One is Canada</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Computer from A to Z</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Magic Moustache</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Addie Was Scared</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the third session, students browsed through the second set of books, and Table 4 indicates the titles that were initially selected. The four books preferred were: 1) Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites, 2) Firedancers, 3) Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers, and 4) Animal Senses. Out of the twelve participants, six boys and four girls selected the information book Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites, while the other information book, Animal Senses, attracted the interest of six boys and two girls.
Firedancers, an Aboriginal book, was preferred by all five girls, as well as, three of the boys. Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers, a fantasy book, was chosen by six boys and two girls.

Table 5

Second Set of Books: Final Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Our Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Four Lions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firedancers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Blizzard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comets</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After browsing through the second set of books, the students repeated the procedure established in session two, choosing one book to read and respond to through writing and/or drawing. Table 5 presents the five books students chose as their favourites. Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers, a cartoon fantasy book appealed to four participants, three of whom were boys, and Firedancers, an Aboriginal book, was preferred by two girls. Two of the books selected for response were not mentioned in Table 4 because of their low overall selection numbers. My Four Lions, a fantasy book, was chosen by two boys and one girl. Spring Blizzard, an Aboriginal book, was selected by one boy and one girl. Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites was the most popular book picked up yet only one boy chose to read and respond to it. The non-Our Choice
book, Animal Senses, was not chosen by any of the participants, although a number had an initial look at it.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Our Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arctic Alphabet</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck in the City</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Seal in the Family</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Load 'em Up Trucks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Worst Band in the Universe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribbon Rescue</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shaman's Nephew</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey's Hottest Series</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundog Rescue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie Summer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share the Sky</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Inuksuk Book</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Wants Rocks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the third set of books, Table 6, the top four books were: 1) Chuck in the City, an Aboriginal book, selected by nine students, seven boys and two girls; 2) Arctic Alphabet, an information book, picked by nine participants, six boys and three girls; 3) A Seal in the Family, a fantasy book, chosen by four boys and four girls; and 4) Load' em Up Trucks, an information book, inspected by eight students, five boys and three girls.
Table 7

**Third Set of Books: Final Selection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Our Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chuck in the City</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Seal in the Family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Load ‘em Up Trucks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribbon Rescue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in the previous response sessions, students selected books to read and respond to through writing and/or drawing. The same preference patterns were demonstrated as in Table 6. Three out of the initial top four books selected were: Chuck in the City, Load ‘em Up Trucks, and A Seal in the Family. The findings, Table 7, show that the book preferred by the majority of the students was Chuck in the City, a non-Our Choice selection. Six students, four boys and two girls, made this Aboriginal cartoon book their choice to read and respond to. The next most popular book, the fantasy story A Seal in the Family, was picked by three students, one boy and two girls. Two boys chose to read and respond to the information book Load ‘em Up Trucks, and one girl chose Ribbon Rescue a fantasy, as the book she wanted to read. Although the information book Arctic Alphabet was initially selected by nine of the participants, none of them chose to read it.
Table 8

Final Interview: The Participants Overall Favourite Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Our Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dreamstones</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck in the City</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Seal in the Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firedancers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey’s Hottest Series: Centers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew And The Midnight Wrestlers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribbon Rescue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the sessions were complete, the researcher interviewed each of the participants and asked them if they could have one book to take home out of all forty-five, which would it be? Table 8 presents the students’ overall favourite books. The most popular book in the study was Dreamstones, as it was selected by three girls and one boy. The second most popular book was Chuck in the City, chosen by two boys. The remaining students each selected a different book as the one they would take home: Firedancers, Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant, Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers, A Seal in the Family, Ribbon Rescue, Hockey’s Hottest Series: Centers.
Research Question Findings

Research Question One: What are the Picture Book Preferences of Grade Four Aboriginal Students?

Throughout the study it was evident that the participants were confident in their picture book selections and able to provide strong evidence to support their preferences. Aboriginal, fantasy, information and realism were the four genres of books used in the study and each student demonstrated specific preferences. Out of the forty-five books chosen for the study, nine books had Aboriginal content and four of those had Aboriginal characters. The books with Aboriginal characters were selected as favourites by the participants, while the books only containing Aboriginal symbols such as, Inukshuks, traditional Aboriginal art or animals portrayed in legends, were not selected. Students identified with the characters and were able to make connections and relate personal experiences. They did not make any connection with the Aboriginal books that only contained symbols and found these books to be “boring” (S/F).

The students enjoyed reading the fantasy books. Five out of the twelve fantasy books were selected by the participants. Three of the books used cartoon illustrations and two were about animals. The fantasy books provided students with the opportunity to live vicariously
through the exciting “make-believe” (S/F) characters in the books and join in their imaginative play.

Boys liked to read information books with realistic illustrations and a minimal amount of text. Although they liked the illustrations the girls did not read any of the information books. Out of the twelve information books, three were selected to be read, but only one was widely popular as it was selected by five boys. The boys enjoyed skimming through of the information books but did not choose to read them. A common complaint was “It’s way too long” (S/M).

Not one realism book was selected for reading by any of the participants throughout the entire study and they did not make any connections with the Caucasian or minority characters in them.
Research Question Two: Which genre, (Aboriginal, Fantasy, Information, Realism), has the greatest appeal for Aboriginal students?

The Aboriginal genre had the greatest appeal. The four most popular books out of the nine, featured Aboriginal characters rather than only Aboriginal symbols or motifs. The four most popular books will be discussed below.

A. Aboriginal

1. Dreamstones by Maxine Trottier

This Our Choice book was the most popular book in the entire study, chosen more often then any other and evoking the strongest responses. Four of the five students who selected it placed it as their first choice out of all forty-five books. The students gave many reasons for choosing the book, including their appreciation of the colourful realistic illustrations and relevant content, which enabled them to make personal connections as they remembered and related stories from their own lives (N/M, B/F, A/F, M/M, & G/F)

Reasons for Initial Selection: The students were excited about the Our Choice book Dreamstones and provided many reasons for supporting their choice. “I picked it because of the title and because it looked interesting” (N/M). One girl, without any hesitation, chose to read the book, “…because of the pictures and the title and because... it
reminds me of when we heard coyotes howling" (A/F). In her response she wrote, “I was curious about why the captine took his son with him and why he followed the foxes. I am curious about how it is to really live where they live” (A/F). “The pictures look so nice” (G/F, A/F, & M/M). One of the students was quick to respond, “I picked this book because it was sort of about my culture” (B/F).

Illustration Preferences: The colourful, realistic drawings were a major attraction for the students. They were intrigued with the characters because they saw their own culture reflected in them. One boy said he chose to read Dreamstones because “the pictures look real, they look like Indian traditions. I like books about Indians” (M/M). He said that the pictures were his favourite part because “they looked real and they remind me of my friends” (M/M). One of the girls said, “The old lady [sitting by the fire] looks like my Kookum” (A/F). Another girl made similar connections with the illustrations when she pointed to the picture of the man’s face and said he looked like her father. “I liked the big face because it reminds me of my dad and the picture looks so real” (G/F).

The students also articulated a strong preference for the realistic illustrations of the animals in this book. One of the girls who spent a long time studying the illustrations pointed out, “I love the picture on the cover, the full blue picture with the white coyote on the back. I loved all of the pictures, they remind me of when I am always traveling and playing on the hills. They are creative, and real, and I liked the details”
The animals are so nice, they are all blue and the wolves are such a nice colour. The pictures were very good because they were colourful pictures, it looks like the dark blue and the light blue are coming together." A girl said, "I have seen wolves and the book had wolves, I like that. I like wolves, seals, dear, and rabbits and the story was about those animals." One of the boys demonstrated his preference for the pictures when he wrote, "I liked it because the pictures looked real and I like it because it is dark out and that boy remind me about me friend." 

Content Preferences: Many of the students demonstrated a preference for the ethnic content of Dreamstones and were able to explain the cultural connections they felt. One girl who consistently made references to and showed great pride in her heritage said, "It was about my culture and I'm status that means your are mostly Indian and tiny bit of white and you are still called an Indian that's what status means." "There are Metis people in the story. I liked this book because it looked like Indians." 

Personal Connections: It was evident from their responses that the students made strong personal connections with Dreamstones. I felt wonderful when the fire had people in it. I liked it. The book is realistic. I learned how to survive alone.... It reminds me of the time I got lost on the reserve, and I was way out in a field. My Kookum and my Moushum come and got me.
Another girl related how the illustrations reminded her of time spent on the reserve: “The pictures were nice and the man looks like my dad. I also liked the picture where the young boy is wrapped in fur and sleeping by the campfire. We went camping and slept by a fire on my reserve and we built the fire with boards and stones” (G/F).

It reminds me of the summer and going to powwows when I saw great beautiful sites. The picture with the fire looks like my Kookum telling stories at ceremonies. I sit beside her and in the morning they tell stories and the older people stay awake and sing songs. We just listen and sit around the fire. They tell those kind of stories in a sweat lodge. Whenever I go to a sweat we sit around a fire with rocks that make it really hot and sweaty and then I stick my head outside for air” (A/F).

Final Favourites: In the final interview, four of the twelve participants (thirty-three percent) chose Dreamstones as the one book out of all forty-five they would take home. With no hesitation one of the girls said “I chose this book because I liked all the pictures, with their carved lines, foxes, and coyotes. My most favourite picture is the one with the hills and animals because it is very peaceful. The pictures are so cool and beautiful. I loved how they described the northern lights” (A/F). She also was able to give concrete examples of why she liked the writing in the story, “I liked when they said when the winter was gone forever, sounds so poetry and awesome, cool. The book made me feel dreamy, I wish I could come into the book and have all this fun” (A/F).
Another student said, “I picked this book because it was about wolves. It has Indians and I like it because it is close to my culture and I want to learn more about my culture. The best part of this book was the pictures because they looked realistic and they were really good paintings” (B/F). “It looks like my friend because he has hair like him. I like the picture where the boy is lying by the fire and the ice. The pictures are cool because they have good colours and look real and I like wolves” (M/M).

The picture make me feel excited because I think my Dad is going to come home, the guy in the pictures looks like him. I like the background in the pictures with all the stars shining and the snow. It was better than all the other books because it reminds me of my family and I like all the animals, the deer, rabbits, wolves, foxes (G/F).

2. **Chuck in the City** by Jordan Wheeler

Reasons for Initial Selection: This non-Our Choice Aboriginal cartoon book was picked out of the third set of books as a favourite by six students. They chose this book because they liked the humorous cartoon pictures, the bright colours and the personal connections they were able to make (M/M, S/M, A/F, D/M, N/M, & C/F). One boy said, he read the book because the pictures looked “cool” and he was curious about what would happen to Chuck when he went into the city.

Illustration Preferences: All readers commented favourably on the illustrations and said they were able to identify with Chuck. “I picked it
because the pictures look cool and there are lots of nice light and dark
colours” (C/F). “It interested me because the story was a kind of realistic
with silly colouring. This one is coloured in good and they don’t have
scribbles” (S/M). Three of the participants wrote in their responses how
they liked the look of Chuck. “I like Chuck because he has long nice hair
in braids” (C/F, A/F & M/M). “It reminded me about my aunty with long
hair” (C/F). Another boy said he liked the pictures because, “They looked
realistic, the buildings and the people looked real” (D/M). After reading
the book one boy said, “It was a good book, the city, the people, the dog,
they look like cartoons. I like how Chuck looks, he looks funny. I liked
the people in the book and the colours are nice and bright” (S/M).

Content Preferences: The students were intrigued with Chuck and
his adventures in the city. “I picked this book because Chuck looked like
he never bin to a city. I was curious about when will he find his new
home” (N/M). Two of the boys stated that they chose the book because
they wanted to read about Chuck getting lost (D/M & M/M).

Personal Connections: Many of the students made emotional
connections and described their feelings about Chuck in the City. “The
book made me feel emotional, funny, joyous, silly” (A/F). “The book made
me feel awesome! It made me feel happy because it felt like me, I felt like
Chuck” (N/M). “The book made me feel glad, cool, awesome, good” (D/M &
S/M). “After I read this book I like it so much. And it made me feel very
happy and I like the pictures. It was very good and realistic” (C/F). The
students related how Chuck in the City told a good story and connected it to events they had taken part in. “The book reminds me of my Kookum because Kookum and I always took walks around the city when it was really, really warm out. It also reminds me of when I first moved away from Dads place in Whitewood. It is similar to me in a way or two, like the part when Chuck wondered off around the city....” (A/F). One of the girls liked the story because, it reminds me of when my sister got lost and I found her near a lake. I learned when you get lost you should go to a police officer. This book is similar to me. We both get lost, I was downtown I tried to look for my mom but she was gone. I went to a building and this person helped me (C/F).

Final Favourites: Two boys chose Chuck in the City as the one book they would like to take home (N/M & S/M). They made concrete associations with the main character. “When I was lost, I was lost like Chuck, I was lost in the city and I was looking for my mom. I like Chuck because he reminds me of me” (N/M). The boys described their preference for the colourful pictures and Chuck’s long braids. They enjoyed relating Chuck’s adventures in the city to their own lives (S/M & N/M).
3. **Firedancers** by Jan Bourdeau Waboose

Reasons for Initial Selection: The Our Choice book was selected by two girls as the one that they wanted to read and respond to out of the second set of books. One of the girls said, “I want to read this book because it is about dancing, fancy dancing, powwow dancing. I used to do fancy dancing when I was little on the reserve” (C/F). “I picked this book because it looks like it is part of my culture” (B/F).

Illustration Preferences: As was found in previous book selections, the students demonstrated a strong preference for the illustrations and made personal connections with the characters. One girl said she liked **Firedancers** “because the pictures are pretty and look like the valley beside my reserve and the spirits in the clouds look really cool. I like the picture of the old grandmother making moccasins because it reminds me of my Kookum and I liked the girl character with the long hair, she looks realistic because her hair looks like my mommy and auntie’s long brown hair” (C/F). Another girl said, “My favourite part was the people in it because they looked realistic and I like pictures that look realistic” (B/F & C/F). “The pictures looked cool because they were kind of smeared” (C/F).

Content Preferences and Personal Connections: The girls enjoyed the traditional content of the story and made connections. “The story was neat when they saw the moccasins dancing and the fire burning” (C/F). “I like the picture where other people are dancing in the clouds...
and they start fancy dancing with the spirits. The pictures look cool, I like how the fire and smoke are surrounding the boy” (B/F).

One of the girls was reminded of the oral tradition of her culture, “It is an Indian book because it is cool because the story teaches you stuff, like don’t whistle at night because it calls out the spirits and it will haunt you” (C/F). She went on to write, “Firedancers was so cool because I used to be a dancer. I went to powwows. Then I felt good because people were clapping. It reminded me of my grandma and my mom” (C/F). “I liked it because they are dancing powwow and they are dancing around the fire” (G/F).

The girls read the book carefully and claimed that they enjoyed the story as well as the illustrations. One girl wrote, “The book tells a good story because it had lots of interesting things in it. Like when the little girl heard some noises like the owl being loud in the pine tree. The pictures looked realistic. And I liked how the moccasins was dancing in mid air” (B/F). “This book reminded me about my grandma and me and when we went to see the river with a fire along the shore between the trees. My mom did the same last year with me and the family” (B/F).

Final Favourite: One girl in her final interview selected Firedancers, as her favourite “because my uncle would like this book and I liked it because liked they [people in the story] dance powwow and I like that because every summer we go to the powwow” (C/F). She explained how
the "best part of the story is when they dance, it reminds me of me because I used to dance. I also really like the cool colours" (C/F).

4. Spring Blizzard by Diane Brooks

Reasons for Initial Selection: Viewing the second set of books, two participants, one boy and one girl, chose to read and respond to the Our Choice book Spring Blizzard. The students chose the book because of the realistic looking colourful pictures, the connections they made with the winter setting of the book and the personal extensions they were able to make from the story. One of the girls said she chose the book because she liked the pictures and the nice colours (G/F). "I like it because it has wolves and I think they are cool and I really like them because they run fast. The pictures are good, they look real" (M/M).

Illustration Preferences: It became evident that the illustrations in Spring Blizzard were a strong feature. "They looked real and make me feel good. I like the book because I like dog's and I like them because the pictures look real" (M/M). "I liked the pictures, they look real and the colours are nice and bright" (G/F) "I like it because they have wolves and I like it because all the pages are night and I like it because the front and back of the pages are blue" (M/M).

Personal Connections: Both students were able to connect certain elements of the story with their background knowledge. "I like the moccasins. She doesn't wear normal shoes and they looked nice because
they have nice designs. They [the moccasins] looked real” (M/M). “I like this book because I like the blizzards and I like moccasins and I like how the leather feel nice. I like it because they don’t wear boot’s and they only war moccasins” (M/M).

A girl said she thought that Spring Blizzard told a very good story because “there was a girl dancing in the blizzard and she made snow angels and I like to do that too” (G/F). She made connections with the Aboriginal characters when she said, “It reminded me of my cousin who I used to play in the snow with but she lives on the reserve now” (G/F).

Aboriginal Titles Discussion:

It became evident early in the study that the students demonstrated an overwhelming preference for books with Aboriginal characters. I was surprised when many of the students skimmed over the group of books and immediately picked up the ones that featured Aboriginal people. “Oh I like this one because I like the girl’s long hair and she lives on the reserve. I had long hair before and it was black” (C/F). Books featuring Aboriginal symbols or motifs were not selected by the participants.

I observed that the students did not distinguish whether or not the books were by Aboriginal authors or illustrators. They did not notice nor did they care as long as they thought the material was interesting and
the illustrations were of quality. All the participants who selected books with Aboriginal people described how they made strong connections between the characters and someone in their own lives. "It reminds me of my Kookum" (A/F). The students were often reminded of their Kookum (grandmother), a correlation easily drawn because it is common for these particular students to be largely raised by their grandmothers. It is also common in the Aboriginal culture to hold their elders in very high regard, as they are taught from an early age to respect their elders.

After viewing the video tapes the independent observers and I confirmed the fact that students selected books featuring Aboriginal people without hesitation. A number of the participants walked into the research room, looked around and immediately picked an Aboriginal book out of the set (S/M, M/M & C/F). Taking Chuck in the City, one boy said, "Oh cool, I want this one, it looks good" (S/M).

The students in the study indicated a strong sense of pride in their Aboriginal culture and felt comfortable talking about it. One girl in particular demonstrated a dedicated preference for reading books about her culture: "The book told a good story because it was about my culture, and I want to learn as much as I can. It had Indians and they looked real and I like things that are about my culture." (B/F). Many of the students were excited about the illustrations and showed a strong preference for Aboriginal characters. "It has Indians they look real" (M/M). The students liked seeing themselves reflected in the illustrations
and felt success when they were able to make connections and extend the story with their own personal accounts.

After contacting experts concerning correct terminology, I was advised to use the inclusive term, Aboriginal, throughout the study. It was interesting to note, however, that the students, in their verbal and written responses, referred to themselves as Indians. The children were not concerned with politically correct terminology and inside the school race was never an issue. In response to the book *Dreamstones*, one girl wrote, “I am status and I like to read books about Indians and learn about my traditions. This book is about three cultures like Metis, status, white. Metis is half white and half Indian. And white is white with kind of dark skin. Status is lots of things” (B/F). She looked up from her response and said, “I am Status. I am this much Indian (she stretched her arms out wide) and this much white (she held up two fingers). Then she turned to me and asked, “Ms. Boyle, What are you? Status or Metis?”

The school where the research study took place incorporates many Aboriginal celebrations and spiritual practices in the day-to-day activities. During the time I was at the school a group of Powwow dancers came to perform at a school assembly. I received permission to videotape the dancing and observed that the children were very focused and concentrated on the dancers and singers. Many of the Aboriginal children at the school lived on a reserve at one time and have grown up
attending the Powwow circuit. Three girls commented on the book *Firedancers* and made personal connections with the dancers as they relayed their own stories of attending powwows and dancing (B/F, G/F, & C/F). “It reminds me of when I used to dance with my cousin at the powwow, we had to go there for a whole weekend” (C/F). It has become evident in the study that it is important for students to see and be exposed to things they are familiar with. Many of the students felt successful and comfortable reading the Aboriginal books because they could associate with the characters and the story line.

I found it very interesting that many of the students were able to transpose the Arctic setting of the book *Dreamstones* and relate it to their reserves in Saskatchewan (G/F, A/F, & N/M). “It reminds me of the time when I got lost on the reserve” (N/M). I was also surprised at the depth of response shown as many of the participants described their feelings. “I thought the book was so good and dazed me. It made me feel joyous, cool, glad, and emotional. I liked the story, characters, pictures. It was one of my favourite books. It reminds me of going to ceremonies and we always camped in the tepees...I loved being there and this reminds me of it” (A/F).
B. Fantasy

The second most popular genre were fantasy books about imaginative worlds. The participants indicated they liked reading about worlds that were far apart from their own reality and often dreamed about trading places with characters in the story. Eighty-three percent (ten out of twelve students) chose a fantasy book at least once. Only two boys (B/M & M/M) stayed entirely away from this category in their book preference, while one student, a girl who had a vivid imagination and loved to engage in imaginative play, chose fantasy books for all three of her selections.

1. Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers by Allen Morgan

Reasons for Initial Selection: The most popular fantasy book from the second set was, Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers, as it was chosen to be read by four participants, three boys and one girl. The students stated they chose to read and respond to this Our Choice fantasy book because they were interested in wrestling as a topic and liked the colourful illustrations (A/F, S/M, C/M, & D/M). One boy wrote, “I picked the Midnight Wrestlers because I like wrestling. The people are the ones I like” (S/M). Another boy was honest when he said, “I like to watch wrestling on TV so that is why I picked this book. I was also curious about if the kid will win the fight” (C/M).
Illustration Preferences: The students who selected Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers all liked the pictures and were able to articulate exactly what it was that they liked about them, going on at length to describe how they felt. “I like the cartoon pictures, they have lots of colour and make me feel good” (S/M). “The story is a cartoon, make believe and I like cartoons because they are funny” (D/M). “I liked the pictures, the colours, the title and what the story was about. I thought the pictures were the best because they were hilarious and the characters looked so funny” (A/F). “They looked goofy and silly and they all had crazy faces, I liked how they looked. I liked the characters because they have a funny skin colour the pictures drawn good” (C/M).

Personal Connections: Many of the students were able to make personal connections with the illustrations and the story and they explained the situations that the story reminded them of. One girl said, “it looks like it is funny with great imagination and it reminds me of my stepdad who is a professional wrestler. The bully in the story reminds me of my cousin and my stepbrother” (A/F). Many of the students related the book to a story from their own life. “The book reminded me of me and my little sister getting into fights” (D/M). Another boy made an association with a character in the story and a bully he had encountered after school: “You know when there is a bully around and you try to defend yourself but you can’t and you get beat up.... I liked when the kid
won against the other kid. It is like me winning against Marshal [the bully]" (C/M).

Final Favourite: The same boy who fantasized about beating up the bully was the only student who chose the book as his overall favourite. “I liked to read it because it’s funny and the drawings are really good. I like wrestling, it was awesome. It was better than all the other books because it had deadly colours and pictures” (C/M).

2. My Four Lions by Bernice Gold

Reasons for Initial Selection: This non-Our Choice fantasy book was selected from the second set of books by two boys and one girl. After a close examination of student responses, it was evident that the students selected the book because of the friendly looking lions in the illustrations (J/M, S/F, & N/M). “I liked the lions... they look like they are friends with the kids in the story. I liked how the lions looked and I liked their faces because the colours in the eyes made them look happy” (J/M).

Content Preferences: The motivation for reading the book was clearly demonstrated when one boy noted, “I wanted to find out how the lions became friends with the boy and how the boy got the lions to listen to him” (J/M). Another boy stated, “The part that interested me was when the boy had four lions waiting there for him guarding his camp. I was curious about if the boy was going to get eaten” (N/M).
Three students commented on how they liked the fantastical elements of the story and stated a preference for this type of writing. "It was a very good book because in one side he is pretending and the other side he is making it up. I liked it because it was unique, interesting and full of imagination" (S/F). She went on to support her selection of this fantasy book with insightful statements in her written response: "I like to use my imagination to pretend and make up games" (S/F). One boy supported the sentiments of S/F when he wrote, "I like when the kid shared pizza with the other lions.... I learned imagination stuff" (N/M).

Personal Connections: The students associated with the story on many levels, and all three of the respondents identified themes of safety, security, and friendship. "I would like to be the kid because then I would have someone to guard me" (N/M). "I like lions and they are big and they can protect you. It would not be scary when the lions are there. They could protect your house and cause someone might come in and steal and they wouldn't steal because the lions would scare them" (S/F). "I liked how the lions protected the kid. I like the part were the lions where not afraid of nuthin. The boy was not afraid to" (J/M).

Friendship was another important theme identified in My Four Lions. After reading the story, one of the boys said, "It was good book because the lions and the kids were good friends and it is hard to find good friends" (N/M). Another boy simply said, "The boy liked the lions and the lions liked him back" (J/M).
3. **A Seal in the Family** by Maria Coffey

Reasons for Initial Selection: This non-Our Choice fantasy book was selected from the third set of books by three participants because it had inviting illustrations of friendly animals (B/F, J/M, & G/F). “I was curious about the part were the seal mom knew where he was. I’m curious about how the seal joins into the family” (J/M).

Illustration Preferences: The students stated that the illustrations were the main factor that drew them to the book. One of the boys explained that he picked this book because of his love for animals and how they looked. “It was a good story because it is real life and the pictures look realistic. I liked the seal because of how his big brown eyes looked, they made me feel good. I liked it because it was gorgous.” (J/M).

Two of the girls said, “I like how the animals looked” (B/F) and “the pictures, they looked great because the colours in the water were mixed with light and dark blue” (G/F). “The seal looks so nice because his nose and tail and his eyes look cute” (B/M).

Final Favourite: One boy chose the book as his favourite out of the three sets of books. He demonstrated through his response a strong preference for fantasy stories about animals dealing with important themes such as friendship and loyalty. “I liked the part were he [the seal] made some friends...and where the cat found the seal. The story made me think of my dog running away, like the seal ran away from his mom. I liked the part were the seal moved in because he need a family” (J/M).
4. **Jillian Jiggs and the Secret Surprise** by Phoebe Gillman

Reasons for Initial Selection: This Our Choice fantasy book was selected from the first set of books for its humour and how it allowed the readers to escape from everyday lives. “I have read other Jillian Jiggs books. It is imagined.... It looks fun” (C/F). Another girl walked into the research room, immediately picked it up and started reading. “I love reading Jillian Jiggs books and the pictures look so interesting. I have read her books before” (S/F). It is important to note that the participants did not consider or mention the illustrations as a strong element in the book, but it quickly became evident that humour was one of the preferred characteristics of the book. “Jillian Jiggs because she is a funny girl who is always dreaming” (A/F).

Content Preferences: One girl said that her favourite part of the fantasy book was “The story and when they [the girls] give her [Jillian’s] mom a surprise. I liked this part because the girl was laughing and it was funny” (C/F). The second reason supporting the selection of **Jillian Jiggs and the Secret Surprise** was the content of an imagined world.

Personal Connections: The girls made personal connections as they compared the character’s world to their own reality. “Jillian has an exciting life and I have a boring life all I do is sit at home. I want to be like Jillian because she is exciting and my life is boring. All I do is sleep, eat, watch TV, read and listen to music and that’s boring so that’s why I want to be like Jillian. She always has something going on, something
planned, she is so creative and she’s got an exciting life” (S/F). Another girl said that Jillian reminded her of when “I play dress up with [my friends] and when we play house” (C/F).

5. **Ribbon Rescue** by Robert Munsch

   Reasons for Initial Selection: One girl picked this non-Our Choice fantasy book as her favourite. “I picked it because there are girls and I like girls and I like the pictures. I also like Robert Munsch books” (S/F). Although the book was classified as a fantasy, the participant decided that, “The story was realistic because at the back of the book it says that Jillian is from the Mohawk reserve, cool!” (S/F).

   Illustration Preferences: Pictures with bright colours were a strong preference and she described in her response what it is she liked about them. “I liked the pictures and words because it was interesting and awesome. But the best part is the colours, the way they show the pictures” (S/F).

   Personal Connections: The student felt a strong connection with the character in the book. She made many personal connections and was able to respond to the book on a deep level. “The thing I like about the book is Jillian shared her ribbon when people really need them. Jillian is similar to my life because she is a sweet and loving girl she shares a lot with people. I do the same thing like Jillian. Because I share and love people. I’m just about like her” (S/F). Responding to the story’s
adventure, she adds, “I wish I could go to a real wedding instead of reading about a wedding. Someday I will meet Jillian. I would feel oh so ever good if I meet miss Jillian. She was very sweet to give up her ribbons. It reminds me of myself. I real liked the book because she real know how to share” (S/F).

Final Favourite: Not surprisingly, S/F picked Ribbon Rescue as her favourite book out of the forty-five books. She said she liked absolutely everything about the story: the words, pictures, and colours. “The story was exciting and she learned how to share and she was very pretty and it was a beautiful story. The pictures were bright and beautiful and had lots of colour” (S/F).

Fantasy Titles Discussion:

Students enjoyed reading fantasy books that allowed them to escape their own lives and jump into the life of the characters. They wanted to live vicariously through the animal and cartoon characters in the books. The boys who read Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers chose the book because wrestling is something they are familiar with and find exciting. The students told me that they watch it on TV and described how they wanted to be wrestlers because then they “could beat up anyone” (C/M, S/M & D/M). Wrestling appears to be a big part of the urban Aboriginal pop culture. This was evidenced by the fact that for Valentines Day I received
three cards with pictures of wrestlers on them. Many of the children have met local wrestlers and know relatives and/or neighbours who wrestle competitively.

It is important to note, that although a number of the books in this genre could be perceived as realistic fiction by some readers, these children saw them as fantasy stories describing imaginative worlds far from their reality. Although on the surface students appeared to be attracted to the fantasy books because of their cartoon characters and bright colourful illustrations, a closer examination of their responses revealed connections with serious themes. Students demonstrated a concern for safety and security by selecting fantasy books that dealt with these themes (J/M, N/M, S/F, & G/F). “My favourite part of the story was when the lions protected the young boy” (J/M). All three children who read the book My Four Lions commented on how they would like to have lions as friends to guard them (N/M, J/M, & S/F).

Many students responded on a deep level and picked up on serious themes that were not always obvious. One girl, an enthusiastic participant who was always lively and co-operative, picked fantasy books for all three of her book choices, expressing numerous reasons why she wished to live the life of a imagined character. She was always excited after reading one of the books and loved to pretend she lived in a “make-believe” world, as she would with a big smile describe in lengthy detail her passionate feelings about the story. “I love reading Jillian Jiggs
books. They are make-believe and so exciting. They make my life
easyer. Every time I read Jillian Jiggs books my life get more greater.
Sometimes I wish I can be just like Jillian Jiggs. She is the most funest
kid I ever herd of” (S/F).

C. Information

It was evident that information books were popular with most of
the boy participants, but only if they had realistic pictures and minimal
text. Seventy-one percent of the boys (five out of seven) indicated an
interest in reading at least one information book during the study,
although the category placed third in total popularity behind Aboriginal
and fantasy books. Not one girl chose to read an information book
throughout the entire study, although one girl started to browse through
the book Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant, she quickly put it down
because “oh yuck it looks so boring” (S/F).

1. Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant by Chris McGwan

Reasons for Initial Selection: In the first set of books, five boys
chose to read and respond to this Our Choice information book. They
said they chose the book because they liked dinosaurs, wanted to learn
more about them, and liked the realistic looking pictures (J/M, C/M, S/M,
D/M & B/M). “I want to find out how they know where the bones are and
how they put them back together” (J/M). “I really like dinosaurs they are
so deadly. I was curious about the bones that made the dinosaurs” (C/M).

Illustration Preferences: Many of the boys stated their preference for realistic, colourful pictures as support for picking, *Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant* (J/M, C/M, B/M, & D/M). One boy said that his favourite part of the story was “The pictures when the dinosaurs looked mad. I liked how the teeth and how the dinosaurs looked. They were realistic and cool in the pictures.” (J/M) It was evident that many of the boys’ strong preferences were driven by the illustrations rather than the text. “I felt exited because how the pictures looked. I felt deadly because how the front looked. I felt cool because the pictures are cool” (J/M).

Content Preferences: Many of the students were aware of the facts they learned from reading the dinosaur book. “I liked how the dinosaurs eat. I liked how they ran fast. It was cool how they make dinosaurs and how dinosaurs walked around” (J/M). The same boy enjoyed describing his feelings after reading the story: “I learned how they killed. I learned how the dinosaurs attacked another dinosaurs” (J/M). Another respondent wrote, “I learnt how they figured out how dinosaurs looked. I learned how they figured how to pet them together” (C/M). “The book made me feel happy, smart and wonderful. I learn about dinosaurs and paleontologists and I think it is an informational book” (B/M).

Final Favourite: Only one boy (B/M) chose *Dinosaurs: Digging Up a Giant* as the book he would take home. He also appeared to be the only
student who was able to make personal connections with the story. He stated he selected the book because it “... reminded me of when I watched the movie Jurassic Park and it scared me a lot. I liked this book because I like dinosaurs and looking for bones. I tried to dig in my yard once to find a dino bone but all I found was a dog bone. It was better because I am into dinosaurs more than I am comets” (B/M). He said the best part of the book were the pictures and the colours. “They look realistic. They teach you about dinos, the colours and pictures do. It was good because it’s easy to read and it can teach you about dinosaurs. Makes me think about science” (B/M).

2. Load ‘em Up Trucks by Debora Pearson

Reasons for Initial Selection: In the third set of books this non-Our Choice information book was chosen by two boys as the book they wanted to read and respond to. Both of the boys stated that the reason they picked the book was because they liked trucks and the “fun looking pictures” (C/M, & B/M). One of the students said he wanted to know, “Why they are moving all this stuff to their place” (C/M).

Illustration Preferences: The pictures in Load' em Up Trucks, were simply drawn and were coloured in non-traditional bright hues. “I think the colours are the best because they had funny colours such as pink, green, blue, and white” (C/M). “I picked this book because the colors and characters are funny on the trucks”(B/M).
Content Preferences: The information that was presented in the book was of particular interest to the boys. “I like the part when the truck carried all of the cars. It is realistic.... I like trucks because you can move stuff, you can pile stuff on each other” (C/M). Another boy said, “I picked it because I just like trucks. I liked the words and how they described what the trucks did” (B/M). “I learned about a cement truck and a grapple truck and a tow truck and a tanker truck and a pick up truck and a transporter and a garbage truck and a ice truck and a ice cream truck and a moving truck and a deliver truck and a toy truck” (B/M). “My favourite truck was the truck that could carry all the cars. It looked cool that it could carry that much weight” (CM).

Personal Connections: One boy continued his reasons for liking the book by describing personal connections he made with the story. “I pick the book because I like trucks because my dad is a truck driver. My dad pick me up on the weekend and lets me come in the big truck” (B/M).

3. Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites by Cynthia Pratt Nicolson

Reasons for Initial Selection: Only one boy selected this information book from the second set of books. Although the non-Our Choice book Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites was initially looked at by ten out of the twelve participants, only one boy chose to read it. The boy stated his reasons for choosing Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites: “I picked it because I am trying to be a smart kid when I grow up. I can
learn about space, asteroids, comets and meteorites. Plus the pictures look cool” (B/M).

Content Preferences: The student said he liked it because “It makes you learn”, but although “it was good, it was too long for me to read” (B/M). He drew a web and sketched his interpretation of the comets and stars. “I like the topic. The topic is on comets, asteroide and meteorites and planets and space objects in space and the milky way and how the dinosaurs got exinct [extinct].” “I liked the pictures, I learn about space. Good colouers” (B/M).

Information Titles Discussion

It is important to note that information books had initial appeal but were not as popular when students were asked to pick a book to read. Many of the students stated a preference for realistic looking pictures, especially when it came to animals, but most of the time the students were turned off by long sections of informational text. For example, the information book Arctic Alphabet, which has a photograph of a white baby seal on the cover, was initially viewed by nine of the participants, but not one student chose to read it because “It is way too long” (C/F, B/F, S/M, & G/F). The same thing happened with the information book Crazy for Horses. The book had large photographs of horses that attracted many students, but once they opened the book,
they quickly put it down because of the large amount of text. “I love horses and the pictures look real, but I’m not going to read it because it is too long” (G/F). Although *Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites* was initially looked at by ten out of the twelve participants, all of the students, except one, put it down because it looked too long a read. It is also important to note that the boy, who selected this book chose information books as all three of his selections (B/M).

Students were initially attracted to information books because of the realistic looking pictures. The girls picked up any book that had photographs of animals, and the boys chose scientific looking pictures as well as animals. Neither gender wanted to read a book that had, in their opinion, too much text. The boys were interested in learning about the topics, while the girls only wanted to look at the “cute” (G/F) pictures. The girls had no interest in “learning” (B/F) about an information topic and would rather read fiction.
D. Realism

There are no findings to report regarding this genre because throughout the entire book selection process, not one student chose to read a realism book. Students did not seem to want or to be able to make connections with the Caucasian characters or even with characters from minorities. Unfortunately, there was no concrete evidence to support reasons for the lack of response to realism books.

Research Question Three: Which specific factors determine the picture book preferences of grade four Aboriginal Students?

It was evident from the results, that the most important factor determining the students' picture book preferences was the appeal of the illustrations. This held true for a number of reasons. The students particularly expressed enjoyment of the intense, bright colours used by a number of the illustrators, and this was apparent by the fact they gave all the books with colourful art work at least a cursory look. Many of the students wrote in their responses how they thought the pictures were the best part of a book. “The pictures were very good because they were colourful pictures, it looks like the dark blue and the light blue are coming together” (G/F).
As noted in early findings, students expressed a strong preference for illustrations that portrayed Aboriginal characters. Realistic representation of Aboriginal people attracted the students' attention. They made personal connections as they related characters in the drawings to themselves or people they know (B/F, G/F, M/M, & N/M). "This picture reminds me of my Kookum" (A/F) The students enjoyed reading about their own culture and explaining how the characters in the books looked realistic. "I liked the pictures, they are good, they look real, they look like Indians. I like books about Indians" (M/M). "I like the little girl in the book [Firedancers]. She looks real and I like pictures that look realistic" (C/F).

An important factor which influenced the students' preferences was their background knowledge, which allowed them to connect to the book. They liked books they were able to relate to and extend the story with personal accounts of similar events or settings. A number of responses contained the phase "This reminds me of..." (M/M, A/F, G/F, B/F, J/M, & C/F).

The participants often transposed the settings illustrated in the books to a place they were familiar with. Students said that some of the illustrations in, Dreamstones and Firedancers, reminded them of time spent on their reserve (N/M, A/F, C/F & G/F). Dreamstones is set in the Arctic but students drew many correlations between the northern setting and their prairie reserves. "The pictures are pretty and they look like the
valley beside my reserve” (A/F). “It reminds me of the time I got lost on
the reserve, I was way out in a field” (N/M). The students also transposed
the settings from the books Chuck in the City and Spring Blizzard and
made connections with their current urban surroundings (A/F, D/M, S/M,
& C/F). “It reminded me of when I was small and I went to see my mom
downtown and I got lost” (M/M). “There was a girl dancing in the blizzard
and she made snow angels and I like to do that too” (G/F).

A further element was the appeal of realism and it became evident
during the study that the students had their own definition of “realistic”
pictures. For example, the students stated that they liked the Aboriginal
cartoon book, Chuck in the City, because Chuck looked “real” (S/M &
M/M). The students also commented on how they liked the “real looking
animals” in A Seal In the Family (J/M, B/F, & G/F). Although by most
definitions these pictures would not be called ‘real’, but in the students’
minds they were.

A final factor that determined the students’ preference appeared to
be the amount of text on each page. Students did not like books that
had lengthy compositions and explained that although they liked the
pictures they didn’t want to read the book because “it was too long” (B/F,
B/M, & G/F).

It was evident from the comments of the students, that certain
specific factors influenced their selection of picture books. The factors
were a combination of colourful realistic illustrations, Aboriginal
characters, and the amount of background knowledge they could connect with the book.

**General Discussion**

The study was conducted in a school with a rather remarkable peaceful climate and a most co-operative administration and teaching staff. As a researcher, I was at an advantage because two years of teaching at the school gave me an insight into the unique culture and climate. The students remembered me and respected me as a teacher and were very quick to feel at ease and relaxed in my presence.

The school itself is an oasis of calm in a neighbourhood that can only be described as a stormy sea. If there is a murder, beating, or drug bust in the city, it is likely that it will have taken place in the area where the school is located. With this in mind, the principal and staff wanted to create a safe haven for students and have developed a mission statement to guide them, “every child must be treated as the Christ child.” This attitude has made a difference and its positive effects are evident in the peaceful loving atmosphere of the school.

A concern that came up even before the study began was how I would be perceived as a non-Aboriginal researcher working with Aboriginal children. Even though I was confident I could be objective, it was important that I be perceived that way as well. I can state unequivocally that the only times race became an issue in the past was
when as a teacher I took my students out of the school. The students, living in a heavily Aboriginal neighbourhood, simply do not distinguish between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people until it is made an issue. As I gained the trust of the students I never felt they were holding back in any of our discussions. They knew I cared for them and they reciprocated by treating me with respect.

There have been many debates in the media about whether non-Aboriginal writers should or should not deal with Aboriginal themes. An interesting extension to the debate comes from two of the most popular books in the study. *Dreamstones* is a sensitive, beautifully illustrated Aboriginal picture book written and illustrated by non-Aboriginals. On the other hand *Chuck in the City*, written and illustrated by Aboriginal people, can be perceived as reinforcing many of the stereotypes that adult readers find offensive. The students did not differentiate because of the ethnicity of the authors or illustrators.

I was often surprised at the unpredictable behaviour of the students. It was obvious that when the students were initially browsing, boys looked at fewer books than did the girls. The girls sat quietly and displayed great concentration as they carefully and meticulously scanned the illustrations. The boys simply glanced over the covers of the books before deciding exactly which one they wanted to browse through. After students finished browsing through the sets of fifteen books, they were very quick in their selection of the title they wanted to read. Often the
students knew as soon as they picked up a book that it was the one they wanted to read and they rarely changed their mind.

The children did not appear to notice or differentiate between the books listed in the 1999 Our Choice Catalogue and non-Our Choice books that were simply taken from the Quill and Quire Reviews. I differentiated between the lists to determine if the children were selecting books that had been deemed quality literature by the Our Choice committee or if it made little difference. In the first set of books, all twelve participants selected an Our Choice book, while in the second set, eight students selected an Our Choice title and four chose an non-Our Choice book. In the third set of books, all twelve students selected to read non-Our Choice books and in the final overall selection eight students chose an Our Choice title and four did not. In the face of these numbers I hesitate to draw firm conclusions because other variables such as the books that were available at the time of the study and the genre of each book may have affected the student choices.

I was surprised with the level of concentration shown by the students and their strong motivation to read an entire book. Once the students began reading, they never stopped, never asked for help, nor did they need to be reminded to stay on task. The students never complained nor did they ever stop reading in the middle of a book, even if it took them twenty-five minutes, which from my experience, was a very long period for them to stay on task. Independent observers noticed an
increase in the students’ attention span from the introductory sessions when they had a small selection of books to choose from, to the formal sessions where they had fifteen books to view. I believe that giving the children the power to make a choice resulted in their feeling committed to read thoroughly the book they chose. One independent observer also noted that the quiet seemingly thoughtful students often chose books with a more serious theme such as Dreamstones, Firedancers, My Four Lions. The high energy, less disciplined children were more likely to prefer the cartoon type books like, Matthew and the Midnight Wrestlers, Chuck in the City, Jillian Jiggs and the Secret Surprise.

Teachers who came into the research room commented on the concentration level of the students and we agreed that it had a lot to do with the individual attention given to them and the lack of distraction such as might be found in a normal classroom.

After the study was concluded the teachers expressed their delight at the quality of work that had been shared with them by the students. They were pleased to note the quality of the writing when the students were able to write about the books they chose. The students were proud to show off their work and the teachers commented on the length and quality of the responses. I was gratified that at the end of the study the teachers agreed that rather than falling behind by being out of class, the students had moved ahead.
A final note that remains with me was the importance of listening to students, giving them the opportunity and the time to express their opinions. The students were confident in their selection of picture books and each one was able to provide concrete evidence to support their choice. The students had definite preferences and were more motivated to read the books they were able to personally select.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

The intent of the research study is to gain insight into the picture book preferences of grade four Aboriginal students. The three research questions, posed in Chapter I, provided a basis for examining and explaining the reasons behind the participants' picture book preferences. The study was conducted during February of the 2000/2001 school year in an inner city Saskatchewan elementary school with a high population of Aboriginal students. A total of twelve grade four Aboriginal students participated in the study, seven boys and five girls.

The students looked at forty-five books that were divided into three groups of fifteen and chose one book from each group to read and respond to through writing and/or drawing. After the book selection and response sessions were complete, the researcher interviewed each child to determine the one book they would most want to take home.
Three research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. What are the picture book preferences of grade four Aboriginal students?
2. What genre, (Aboriginal, fantasy, information, realism) has the greatest appeal for the students?
3. Which specific factors determine the picture book preferences of Aboriginal grade four students?

Conclusions and Implications

An analysis of the findings resulted in the following conclusions:

1. The students preferred to read picture books that portrayed realistic Aboriginal characters that reflected their own image. This gave them a sense of cultural pride.

The grade four students were quick to select books that had Aboriginal characters on the covers. Once they opened the books they closely examined the illustrations and often saw their Kookum's, father's or friend's image reflected in the characters. The students also saw their own image, thus making strong personal connections to the Aboriginal characters. "All readers...need books that allow them glimpses of the selves they are, visions of the selves they'd like to become, and images of
others that allow them to see beyond who they are" (Galda, 1998, p. 275).

Implication: Children need to be able to see their own image in the stories they read. They should be able to identify with the characters, thus feeling a sense of pride in their culture as it is reflected in the illustrations and text. "Few people would dispute that all children need books that represent their cultural heritage. In this way all children have characters with whom they can identify" (Opitz, 1999). There is a need for more quality children’s literature that portrays Aboriginal characters so that teachers and librarians can provide a variety of literature portraying the culture and people their students are familiar with.

2. The students transposed the urban and rural settings in the Aboriginal books to make relevant connections with their lives.

To make connections to their lives, students preferred to transpose the exotic Arctic setting of Dreamstones and associate it with the valleys and fields of their prairie reserves. The students ignored the northern setting as they viewed the illustrations, taking only what they thought was relevant and applying it to their knowledge of life on the reserve. Students told stories of walking in the valley beside a large lake and how they were reminded of this after browsing through the pictures of
Firedancers. The participants also transposed the generalized urban settings of Chuck in the City and Spring Blizzard to that of their own city, as they relayed stories of being lost downtown and making snow-angels in their backyard. The students were able to step inside the books and bring the characters to a familiar place.

Implications: It is important for students to be able to see realistic Aboriginal characters doing everyday activities in both rural and urban environments. It is especially important that students be able to read about Aboriginal characters in the city doing activities such as playing basketball and going to movies. Students want to see Aboriginal characters on the reserve because it is a rich part of their experience, but at the same time they also want to see authentic imaging in the city, where so many Aboriginal children in this study live. Students need to be given the opportunity to read about Aboriginal children in an urban environment, living the life of a ten year old. Teachers and librarians need to select books that not only show minority characters in traditional setting, but they must also include books with modern day portrayals.
3. The genre with the greatest appeal was Aboriginal books portraying Aboriginal people.

Books with Aboriginal characters were appealing because they were realistic. “My favourite part is the characters, they looked real and I like that” (B/F). They appreciated this genre because the story lines were often familiar. Students, drawing on knowledge acquired directly or from friends and relatives, based their decisions as to what was or was not realistic. In discussing *Dreamstones*, they talked about how the pictures with people in the fire were realistic. They also commented on text and illustrations as being realistic when it reminded them of stories told at home, around a campfire or in a sweat lodge on a reserve. In a totally different manner, the students also stated they liked *Chuck in the City* because it, too, was realistic. Rather then portraying fantasy figures, *Chuck in the City* told the story of a young Aboriginal boy lost in a large city. All the children could relate to the problems Chuck faced and one could speculate that the city was in some ways seen by the students as not much different from the forest and plains of the reserve. Both are places where one could get lost and be happy to receive help from a friendly relative.

Although there is no proof of a direct connection, other then the number of times students mentioned having stories told to them on the reserve or by their Kookum, one can not avoid the thought that the
Aboriginal storytelling traditions had much to do with how the Aboriginal children in this study viewed the literature put before them. They were just as comfortable with the dream sequences in stories as they were with the very real tale of a boy lost in a city.

Implications: Aboriginal children in this study prefer to read books about their culture with realistic Aboriginal characters. They desire books that allow them to connect the characters and story line to their own lives. Teachers and librarians need to provide culturally authentic picture books for their students. “Readers from a particular cultural group will find material drawn from their own culture more interesting” (Huck et al., 2001, p. 35). Authors, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, must be encouraged to provide more material that meets these requirements.

Teachers must honour and respect their Aboriginal students’ oral tradition. It is important for adults to provide students with Aboriginal books, while at the same time encouraging oral storytelling in class. Teachers need to recognize that Aboriginal students may tell their stories in a different way than non-Aboriginal students.
4. Students preferred vivid realistic illustrations with bright bold colours.

The quality of the children's literature being published today has never been higher. Beautiful illustrations using a variety of mediums are the rule rather than the exception. Enough children commented on the vivid colours and stylish illustrations of the books to make the point that illustrations are very important and have a great impact on their decision to read or not read a book. Realistic illustrations using bright vivid colours were specific factors in attracting the attention of the students and encouraging them to take the time to read the text. The students paid close attention to detail and often commented on the type of medium they thought was used to create the illustrations.

Implications: Publishers need to ensure that books with Aboriginal themes are produced with the same concern for artistic quality as are books in any other genre. The students, in explaining their choices, revealed that it was the illustrations that drew them to a particular book, not the text. Teachers must understand how important illustrations are to pique the interest of students, who will then go on to discover what is written in the text.
5. The students’ rich background experience frequently determined their preferences in books and also increased their motivation to read.

Students chose to read books written on themes they were innately familiar with such as they allowed them to connect previous knowledge and feel successful and comfortable. A specific factor in student picture book preferences was whether or not the book contained something they were familiar with. It was also obvious from comments made and from their body language that the children appreciated the opportunity to make choices about what books they would read. The students took time to make their selection and, once they selected a book, were possessive and obviously felt they had made a commitment to read the book thoroughly.

Students are more likely to read when they are allowed to select a book that is of interest to them. Students like to read about things they know something about. They respond on a deeper more meaningful level when they are able to connect the book with events in their own lives.

Implications: Teachers should ask students what they are interested in and what they want to read. Students need to be provided with books that allow them to make strong links with and connect with their previous knowledge. “Children’s personal experiences influence
their interests in ways that teachers and librarians might never be able to discover” (Huck et al., 2001, p. 37). Teachers who empower their students by giving them choices will find that they will read more books and make meaningful responses as they connect with the literature on a personal level. The students will also be more likely to discuss the merits of the book and how they interpret any message the book might have.

6. Realistic pictures with minimal amounts of text held great appeal for boys when selecting information books.

As was stated in Chapter I, the majority of Aboriginal students come to school with little or no exposure to books (Ward, Shook, & Marrion, 1996). Children lacking this exposure are unlikely to appreciate books that have a lengthy text and, in fact, may be turned off books altogether. The boys were all initially attracted to information books but once they took a closer look were discouraged by the large amounts of text. Rather than trying to force children to read books they find unappealing, teachers should draw them into an appreciation of literature by providing them with books written on subjects they like with quality illustrations and minimal text.
Implications: Teachers and librarians must be careful to provide children with an appropriate selection of books to choose from. Students may not state publicly that they won't read a book because they are turned off by what is in their opinion, too much text. Hence, teachers and librarians must take the time to select appropriate materials.

Limitations

This study analyzes grade four Aboriginal students’ picture book preferences in an inner city Saskatchewan elementary school. It has limited generalizability and could only be replicated with a similar socio-economic class of urban Aboriginal students. The school where the study took place is a special unconventional environment where the caring staff regard the students as though they were family. This unique atmosphere restricts the results of the research somewhat and decreases the chances of transferability. The researcher was also well known throughout the school by staff and students, and, while this proved to be a positive factor, it does limit the chances of future replication of the study. The small sample of twelve participants also limits the generalizability of the results. Finally, the researcher would have liked to have had a larger selection of books, especially Aboriginal books, but was restricted by the limitations of only using Canadian books published in 1999.
Recommendations for Further Research

There are a number of important areas in need of further research. First, a study of Aboriginal student picture book preferences would benefit by using a larger sample of Aboriginal children of varying ages. In conjunction with this continuation, it would be beneficial to extend the study to include other Aboriginal groups in various geographical regions such as British Columbia and Alberta.

Second, extending the study to other socioeconomic classes is well worth further examination. It would be valuable to conduct a comparative study using the same research design and materials with students from different areas of a city as it is not clear what the extent of the transferability of the results of this study would be to other groups. Would the various groups of students select the same books to read? How does children's economic class affect their picture book preferences? It is clear that more research needs to be conducted to clarify and determine the picture book preferences of many different groups of children, so that the acquisition of books may meet the interests of the students.

Third, further research could be adapted to expand the study to include a larger selection of books used to investigate the picture book preferences of Aboriginal students. A more in-depth analysis, over a longer period of time, would be beneficial to more clearly understand what specific factors influence students' book selection. It would also be
worthwhile to adapt the study to examine Aboriginal students’ picture book preferences using only the genre of Aboriginal.

This study, while important, is a beginning for a larger body of research that needs to be conducted to address the ongoing changes in the education system and its ability to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. The hope is that researchers, principals, and teachers will begin to realize that more needs to be done to help Aboriginal students succeed at school. Gathering and examining data about the results of this picture book selection process will provide information to teachers and librarians. This information will help them to select and evaluate literature that will be of greater interest to Aboriginal students, encouraging them to read more.

A Final Reflection

My research questions were developed through my motivation to help Aboriginal students combined with my love and knowledge of children’s literature. As a classroom teacher I tried to pick books that would interest my students, but I never knew exactly what books they wanted or would be motivated to read. I wanted to hear what my students had to say about books when they were not worried about what I wanted to hear.
So what does this all mean? As a researcher, I learned about the power of choice. Students were more motivated to read when they were able to select the books that they found interesting. Each student had specific preferences, ones that I could never have predicted without spending time gaining the confidence of the students and then listening as they explained the reasons for their choices. The students knew what they wanted to read and were confident in their selection. They were happy and excited to be given the freedom to explore and decide for themselves what was a good book.

As a teacher, I take away from this study, a preliminary plan for getting children excited about literature. I want to provide my students with the opportunity to select books in which they can see their own reflection and authentic images of family and friends. I want to provide books that they are able to identify with, make personal connections with, and feel successful while reading.

The fire grows larger and brighter. I feel its heat kissing my face. My eyes are drawn to the intense light. Cracking and hissing fills the night's silence. I cannot move. I stand and watch the smoke changing shape, taking on forms, like ancient warriors spiralling to touch the sky. I hear it. Distant but coming closer. The beating of the scared drum, growing louder, pounding in my ears. And now another sound. The rhythm of moccasins pounding hard earth. The wind - or is it - taps my back (Firedancers, 1999, p. 25-26).
Bibliography


Koskinen, P., Palmer, B., Colding, R.M., & Gambrell, L. (1994). In their words: What elementary students have to say about motivation to read. The Reading Teacher, 48, 176-178.


Appendices

Appendix A

Picture Books in the Our Choice Catalogue, 1999

* Denotes books used in the study.

Fantasy


**Realism**


Information


Books with Aboriginal Content

*Marchand, Barbara. (1999). Kou-skeloh = We are the people. Theytus Books.
Appendix B

Picture Books Not Listed in the Our Choice Catalogue, 1999

* Denotes books used in the study.


Information


Books with Aboriginal Content

